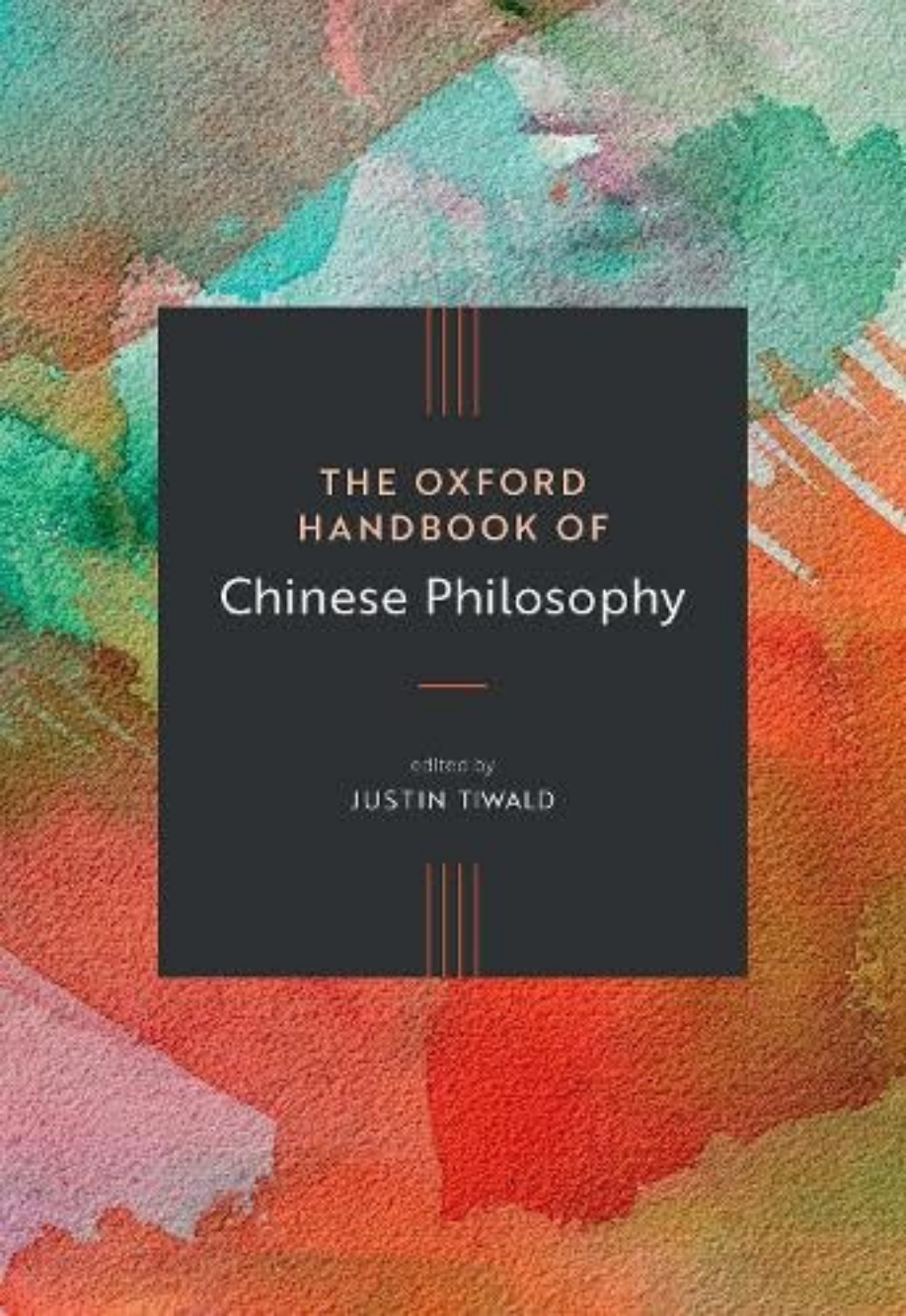
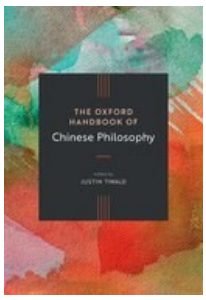

THE OXFORD
HANDBOOK OF
Chinese Philosophy
edited by
JUSTIN TIWALD



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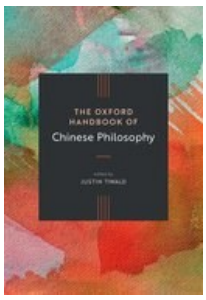

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Preface FREE

Justin Tiwald

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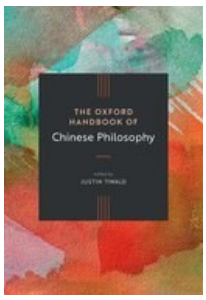
This book began more than a decade ago, under the direction of Peter Ohlin of Oxford University Press. At the time, there were not many philosophers who published on Chinese thought in English, and only a subset of those had the time and energy to produce work on the topics that I needed for this volume. I also wanted this handbook to cover something of the greater historical span and philosophical breadth of the vast philosophical tradition in China, rather than produce yet another anthology consisting of three or four chapters on various aspects of the *Analects*, another three or four on various aspects of the *Daodejing*, and so on. But there were vanishingly few anglophone scholars working on the great philosophers in Chinese history who are, then and now, "lesser-knowns" in the West. As some contributors dropped out and others changed topics, I had to go back and find more contributors to cover gaps that appeared anew. Between that and my seemingly incurable habit of overcommitting to research and service projects, the publication of this book was delayed multiple times. I thank the contributing scholars for their patience, as well as Peter Ohlin. I also thank Melanie June Dorson, my partner and spouse, who saw no small part of the inconvenience of these delays and duplications of editorial work.

The development that really enabled me to finish this book was my good fortune in hiring Sihao CHEW 周思豪 as a research assistant. A truly superb scholar of Chinese philosophy and historical Chinese texts in his own right, and a native-level speaker and writer of both Modern English and Modern Chinese, Sihao put many of hours of work into the tasks that are critical for a volume such as this and yet not reasonable to expect of an anglophone publisher's normal production team. Furthermore, he was unfailingly good natured, conscientious, and judicious. I mean it when I say that the volume is far better for his help. I am also grateful for the help of Edmond Hin Yang LAI 黎顯揚, who produced the index for this complicated volume and helped with the final stage of production. For any errors that remain after the interventions of these conscientious scholars, I can say with confidence that I am at fault. ↳



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Contributors FREE

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Erin M. Cline is the Paul J. and Chandler M. Tagliabue Distinguished Professor in Interfaith Studies & Dialogue at Georgetown University and Senior Research Fellow in the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs. She is the author of five books and numerous articles on Chinese and comparative philosophy, including her most recent works, *Little Sprouts and the Dao of Parenting: Ancient Chinese Philosophy and the Art of Raising Mindful, Resilient, and Compassionate Kids* (Norton, 2020) and *The Analects: A Guide* (Oxford, 2022). She teaches Chinese philosophy, Chinese religions, and comparative philosophy and theology at Georgetown.

Loubna El Amine is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University. Her research interests include comparative political theory, the history of political thought, and ancient Chinese political thought. Her first book, *Classical Confucian Political Thought: A New Interpretation*, was published in 2015 by Princeton University Press. She is currently working on a second book, titled *Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Inclusion in the Ancient Confucian Political Community*. She holds a PhD in politics from Princeton University and a BA in political studies from the American University of Beirut.

David Elstein is Professor of Philosophy and Asian Studies at SUNY New Paltz. He received his PhD from University of Michigan and was a postdoctoral fellow at Academic Sinica in Taiwan. His research focuses on contemporary Confucian philosophy. He is author of *Democracy in Contemporary Confucian Philosophy* (Routledge, 2014), editor of *Dao Companion to Contemporary Confucian Philosophy* (Springer, 2020), and translator of *The Chinese Liberal Spirit: Selected Writings of XU Fuguan* (SUNY Press, 2022). In addition, he has published articles in *Philosophy East and West*, *Dao*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, and *European Journal of Political Theory*.

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Previously, he was Professor and Chair in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong and
p. xii Richard Charles and Esther ↳ Yewpick Lee Chair in Chinese Thought and Culture at the University of Toronto. He has published widely on Chinese philosophy in the fields of ethics, political philosophy, moral psychology, language and logic, epistemology, and metaphysics. His books include *Zhuangzi: Ways of Wandering the Way* (Oxford, 2024), *Late Classical Chinese Thought* (Oxford, 2023), *The Essential Mozi* (Oxford, 2020), *The Philosophy of the* Mozi (Columbia, 2016), and a translation of *Zhuangzi* (Oxford, 2025).

Eirik Lang Harris is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Colorado State University. His research focuses on early Chinese philosophy, with a particular interest in the relationship between ethics and political theory. He is the author of *The Shenzi Fragments: A Philosophical Analysis and Translation* (Columbia, 2016) and coeditor, with Henrique Schneider, of *Adventures in Chinese Realism: Classic Philosophy Applied to Contemporary Issues* (SUNY, 2022). His translation of selections from the *Han Feizi* appears in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, third edition (Hackett, 2023).

Yong Huang is currently a Professor of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Authors of three monographs in English and five in Chinese, he has published over 100 book chapters and journal articles each in Chinese and English, with a focus on ethics, political philosophy, and philosophy of religion from a Chinese–Western comparative perspective. He is founding editor of *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy, Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy*, and *Fudan Studies in Encountering Chinese Philosophy*.

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Philip J. Ivanhoe (PhD Stanford University) is a Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Georgetown University. He specializes in the history of East Asian philosophy and religion and its potential for contemporary ethics. He has held numerous endowed chair positions, including Distinguished Chair Professor of Philosophy at Sungkyunkwan University, Chair Professor of East Asian and Comparative Philosophy and Religion at City University of Hong Kong, John Findlay Visiting Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Boston University, and Austin J. Fagothey, S. J., Distinguished Visiting Professor in Philosophy at Santa Clara University. Professor Ivanhoe has published over 30 books and more than 100 articles. For his CV, Wikipedia page, and other information, see the Georgetown University web page: https://gufaculty360.georgetown.edu/s/contact/0031Q00002G08aNQAR/philip-ivanhoe.

Tao Jiang is Professor of classical Chinese philosophy and Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, with a joint appointment in the Department of Religion and the Department of Philosophy at Rutgers University in New
p. xiii Brunswick, New Jersey, ↳ USA. His books include *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China* (Oxford, 2021), which received the honorable mention of the 2023 Joseph Levenson Prize for pre-1900 China, *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind* (Hawai'i, 2006) and *The Reception and Rendition of Freud in China* (Routledge, 2013, coedited with Philip J. Ivanhoe). Jiang is the founder and codirector of Rutgers Workshop on Chinese Philosophy. He directs the Rutgers Center for Chinese Studies and cochairs the Neo-Confucian Studies Seminar at Columbia University.

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Buddhist Thought & Culture, 2020); and "The Architecture of Fazang's Six Characteristics" (*British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2019).

Li Kang is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Washington and Lee University, specializing in metaphysics (broadly construed), Buddhist philosophy, and Chinese philosophy. Her research establishes connections between contemporary analytic philosophy and Chinese Buddhism, with a particular focus on the Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan/Zen schools. Her overarching goal is to explore how different philosophical traditions can enrich one another and how cross-cultural collaborations can advance our inquiry into profound questions about the world and our own existence.

Richard Kim is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago. He works on ethics, moral psychology, and East Asian Philosophy. His publications include *Confucianism and the Philosophy of Well-Being* (Routledge, 2020) and articles in journals such as *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, History of Philosophy Quarterly*, and *Philosophy Compass*. His current research interests include virtue, emotion, friendship, and the good life.

Karyn Lai is Professor of Philosophy at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Her research examines the nature of moral life in the Confucian tradition and the *Zhuangzi*'s views on knowledge, agency, and freedom. She is author of *Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 2017), which has been translated into Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese. Her edited books include *Knowers and Knowledge in East-West Philosophy* (Palgrave, 2022) and *Skill and Mastery: Philosophical Stories from the Zhuangzi* (edited with Wai Wai CHIU; Rowman and Littlefield, 2019). She is coeditor of the Chinese philosophy section, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, coeditor of the book series *New Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Oxford), and Associate Editor of the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

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↳ **Chenyang Li** is a professor and the founding head of the Philosophy Department at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is the author of *Reshaping Confucianism* (Oxford, 2023), *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony* (Routledge, 2014), *The Tao Encounters the West* (SUNY, 1999), and of over 100 journal articles and book chapters. His edited volumes include *The Sage and the Second Sex* (Open Court, 2000), *The Virtue of Harmony* (with Dascha Düring, Oxford, 2022), *Harmony in Chinese Thought* (with Dascha Düring and Sai Hang KWOK, Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), *Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems* (with Franklin Perkins, Cambridge, 2015), *Moral Cultivation and Confucian Character* (with Peimin NI, SUNY, 2014), *The East Asian Challenge for Democracy* (with Daniel Bell, Cambridge, 2013). He was President of the Association of Chinese Philosophers in North America (ACPA), President of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy (ISCP), and an inaugural Berggruen Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford University.

Hui-chieh Loy is Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore. His published research is mainly in early Chinese philosophy, with forays into cognate fields and in research relating to education in collaboration with others. He has also contributed to the *Dao Companion to the* Analects, the *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi*, the *Dao Companion to the Chinese Philosophy of Logic*, and other volumes on Chinese philosophy.

Hagop Sarkissian is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at the City University of New York (CUNY), Baruch College, and Professor of Philosophy at CUNY Graduate Center. His research is located at the intersection of cognitive science, ethics, and classical Chinese philosophy. He has authored or coauthored papers in these areas for several journals, including *Philosophical Studies*, *Philosopher's Imprint*, *Philosophy East & West, Dao*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *Mind & Language, British Journal for the History of Philosophy, History of Philosophy Quarterly*, and *the Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, as well as numerous anthologies. He is coeditor, with Jennifer Cole Wright, of *Advances in Experimental Moral Psychology* (Bloomsbury, 2014) and, with Philip J. Ivanhoe,

Owen J. Flanagan, Victoria S. Harrison, and Eric Schwitzgebel, of *The Oneness Hypothesis* (Columbia, 2018). His work has been translated into Chinese and Korean.

May Sim is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Asian Studies at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts. She is the Director of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy and served as the past president of a couple of regional societies, as well as the Metaphysical Society of America. Her publications include *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius* and over 50 essays on Eastern and Western philosophies. She is the contributing editor of *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature: Essays on Aristotle's Ethics and Metaphysics* and *From Puzzles to Principles?: Essays on Aristotle's Dialectic*. Her current research includes two books: one develops a Confucian account of human rights, and the other compares the metaphysics and ethics of Eastern and Western classical philosophers.

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David B. Wong is the Beischer Professor of Philosophy at Duke University. He has written essays in contemporary ethical theory, moral psychology, and on classical Chinese philosophy. His books are *Moral Relativity* (California, 1984), *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (Oxford, 2006), and *Moral Relativism and Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2023). He has coedited with Kwong-loi SHUN *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community* (Cambridge, 2004). *Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy: David Wong and His Critics*, edited by Yang XIAO and Yong HUANG (SUNY, 2014), is a book of critical commentaries on *Natural Moralities* and contains responses from Wong to each of the commentaries. *Metaphor and Analogy in Early Chinese Thought* (中國古典思想中的譬喻與類比, Chengchi, 2022) is the Chinese edition of lectures and responses delivered at National Chengchi University in 2021.

Bryan W. Van Norden is the James Monroe Taylor Chair in Philosophy at Vassar College (USA). He has published 10 books on Chinese and comparative philosophy, including *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Hackett, 2011) and *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (Columbia, 2017). Van Norden's video lecture series on Chinese philosophy is freely available online via his website, bryanvannorden.com. A recipient of Fulbright, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Mellon fellowships, Van Norden has been honored as one of The Best 300 Professors in the United States by *The Princeton Review*. His books and articles have been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Estonian, Farsi, German, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish.

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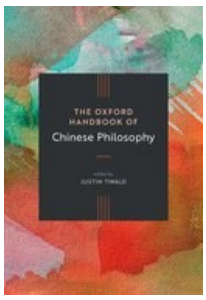

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FRONT MATTER

Introduction

Justin Tiwald

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I. A Long and Sophisticated Philosophical Tradition

From the sixth century BCE through the early 19th century CE, China had a tradition of philosophical reflection and discourse that was wide ranging, profound, and largely of its own making. The surviving texts consist not just of collections of pithy saying like the *Analects* and the *Daodejing*, nor just of esoteric or mind-bending stories like those found in the *Zhuangzi* or a Buddhist *kōan* (*gōng'àn* 公案), but also of hundreds of thousands of pages of treatises, philosophical letters, and records of dialogues between influential teachers and their interlocutors. Many of the major figures were system builders, seeking to develop coherent and comprehensive accounts of things like virtue, heart-mind, knowledge, institutional power, laws, and the relations between parts and their wholes. Chinese thinkers and writers developed conceptual frameworks and metaphors to articulate their views with subtlety and nuance, and they argued at length about how best to understand controversial concepts and terms of art. They addressed their arguments sometimes to sympathetic audiences and sometimes to critics and skeptics, and many saw it as their task to question or justify fundamental assumptions or presuppositions. Philosophical writings were also at the very center of the lives of the lettered. Some Confucian texts were the chief topic of the civil service exams and thus memorized by many millions of examination candidates. Scholars published authoritative anthologies and primers so that aspiring scholar-officials and educated people more generally could have accessible introductions to entire systems of thought.

Furthermore, this tradition of philosophical reflection and discourse was largely China's own. Although a great number of Buddhist texts were brought to China and translated into Chinese in the fourth through seventh centuries, as a body of theoretical beliefs and conceptual frameworks, much of Chinese Buddhism stood apart from its South Asian sources. Very few of China's literati were even aware of European (Western) philosophy before the publication of Matteo Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義) in 1603, and neither Ricci's work nor the other early ↳ Chinese-language introductions to European religion and philosophy had much of an influence on Chinese thought before the 19th century. For the better part of two and a half millennia, Chinese philosophy was a vast and in many respects technical discipline unto itself, responsive primarily to its own questions and demands, and developing its own views and arguments without direct input from philosophy in other corners of the world.

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With some notable exceptions, most of the philosophical richness of the Chinese tradition has not been accessible to people in the English-speaking world. Perhaps the most obvious obstacle is just that many of the texts have never been translated into English. Access to the broader Chinese tradition has also been hampered by the tendency of later Chinese philosophers to presuppose some familiarity with their metaphysics and technical terms (much like their counterparts in Europe and South and Central Asia). And access has also been limited by the fact that few in the English-speaking world are even aware of the full depth, breadth, and complexity of the tradition, often assuming that most or all of Chinese philosophy is to be found in laconic classics like the *Analects* and the *Daodejing*.

One of the aims of this handbook is to provide anglophone readers with many more points of entry into the broader Chinese philosophical tradition. The chapters herein accomplish this both by covering figures across the historical tradition (including many who are "lesser-knowns" in the West) and by presenting their views and arguments in more accessible ways. On the assumption that many readers will find the dizzying array of thinkers and texts difficult to track without a basic narrative and structure, I will devote some space to organizing them into three historical movements and some subgroupings. The classifications are (unavoidably) somewhat roughly hewn, but even a rough set of groupings will help readers to get a handle on the influential figures and their place in Chinese history.

II. A Brief Historical Synopsis in Three Parts (More or Less)

i. The Classical Period

By most accounts, Chinese philosophy finds its footing in a time of tremendous philosophical pluralism and debate, in an early period that begins with the life of Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius, whose traditional dates are 551–479 BCE) and ends with the unification of China under the Qin emperor in 221 BCE. This is often called the *classical period* or pre-Qin period of Chinese philosophy. It is pivotal in part because it witnessed the composition of what are now regarded as the founding, canonical texts of two of China's great schools of thought, Confucianism and Daoism. However, for participants in the great debates of this time, the views that are

now classified as Confucian and ↳ Daoist views were just two types among many. There were so many original thinkers and competing positions that later historians sometimes refer to them collectively as "the hundred schools of thought" (*zhūzǐ bǎijīa* 諸子百家). Other than the foundational texts of classical Confucianism and Daoism, texts from most of the other "schools" have not survived. One notable set of exceptions consists of the texts of the Legalists thinkers, who are often regarded as the first to write systematic theoretical essays on state power and the nature of institutions and also the first to develop sophisticated arguments for extreme realism or nonideal approaches to politics and ethics. Another fascinating exception is the *Mozi*, which contains the extant works of the Mohists, usually regarded as the world's first consequentialists and authors of the first philosophical essays and glossaries that attend closely to formal features of language and arguments.

Being such a wide-ranging and important period of Chinese thought, this volume has several contributions on thinkers and texts from the classical period, covering both the mainstays and the lesser-knowns. In "A Theological Voluntarist Consequentialism in the *Mozi*" (Chapter 1), Hui-chieh LOY is primarily interested in the foundations of the Mohists' consequentialist ethics. He argues that Heaven's will plays a foundational role in explaining or determining the proper *dào* 道 (way of conducting one's life or organizing communities), and that their invocation of Heaven was meant to help explain the distinctive impartiality and weightiness of moral demands. The foundations of Confucian ethics are the subject of two other chapters, Philip J. Ivanhoe's "The Nature of Moral Norms in Xunzi's Philosophy" (Chapter 2) and Chenyang Li's "*Qing* 情 as the Foundation of Xunzi's Naturalist Ethics" (Chapter 3). The writings of the classical Confucian philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (third century BCE) range very widely, with expository essays on politics, cosmology, epistemology, the nature of language, and the naturalistic justification of traditional rituals. But he is most famous for defending the thesis that human nature is bad and in need of dramatic reshaping. In Ivanhoe's chapter, he addresses a long-standing problem in interpreting Xunzi, which stems from Xunzi's view that humans are distinct in having *yì* 義, conventionally translated as a "sense of duty" in a famous passage. Ivanhoe argues instead that *yi* is better translated as "social norms" and then spells out the implications for Xunzi's views about the power of culture, individual reasoning, and nature to shape the character of people, suggesting that Xunzi's views on this matter compare favorably with those of thinkers like Edmund Burke,

Immanuel Kant, and Steven Pinker. In Chenyang Li's chapter, he follows other interpreters in reading Xunzi as a naturalist about the foundations of ethics and seeks to spell out the specific role of *qing* (feelings, actual circumstances) in accounting for ethical norms like ritual propriety and morality, offering a careful reading that is fully compatible with his famous doctrine of human nature.

Xunzi stands out from many of the world's great philosophers in offering robust and comprehensive views about the importance of deference to tradition (especially ritual tradition) and to teachers of the tradition. Two chapters in this volume are devoted to spelling out both Xunzi's case for this sort of pervasive deference and its implications for individual autonomy, moral development, and
p. xx epistemic authority. In Aaron Stalnaker's "Dependence and Autonomy in Early Confucianism" (Chapter 13), he explores ↳ multiple ways in which classical Confucians like Xunzi and Mengzi (Mencius) propose to help people achieve a kind of virtue or mastery through relationships of dependency, characterizing the ideal outcome as a kind of autonomy without independence. In Eric L. Hutton's "Xunzi and the Authority of Tradition" (Chapter 19), he compares Xunzi's defense of deference to epistemic authorities with that of the present-day epistemologist Linda Zagzebski. With help from Zagzebski, he reconstructs a robust and plausible account of trust (*xìn* 信) that can capture people's good reasons for treating certain traditions as authoritative, and with help from Xunzi, he calls attention to potential weaknesses in both Zagzebski's and Xunzi's views.

This volume includes a number of chapters that offer important new takes on "core issues" in the classical tradition, combining summaries of the classical sources with original analysis or interpretation. These include Richard Kim's "Well-Being in Early Chinese Philosophy" (Chapter 5), in which he explains how classical Confucians, Mohists, and Daoists are able to account for the prudential value of certain goods that figure centrally in their texts, such as family relationships, virtues, social order, equanimity, and free wandering. His analysis touches on important controversies in present-day philosophy of well-being, such as debates about the subjectivity or subject dependence of human welfare. In David B. Wong's "Human Nature in the Ethics of Mengzi and Xunzi" (Chapter 6), he revisits both Mengzi's and Xunzi's views about the ethical character of human nature. Although Mengzi famously defends the view that human nature is good and Xunzi defends the view that human nature is bad, Mengzi recognizes that some inborn dispositions can impede the cultivation of virtues, and Xunzi allows that some inborn dispositions can motivate ethical improvement. Wong traces some of the ambiguities in the Mengzi–Xunzi debate to uncertainties about what it means for a disposition to be part of human nature, uncertainties that are both reflected in and informed by recent empirical studies. In Chris Fraser's "A Daoist Critique of Morality" (Chapter 7), he reconstructs critiques of common-sense morality in the *Daodejing* and (especially) the *Zhuangzi.* He explains why both the pursuit and the evaluative use of benevolence and righteousness (two paradigmatic moral virtues) tend to be problematic for the more basic or important task of recognizing and following the Way (Dao), and he compares the critiques found in classical Daoism with those of more recent "morality critics" in the West. In Karyn Lai's "Being Spontaneous: Zhuangzi on Mastery" (Chapter 12), she offers a fine-grained epistemic account of spontaneity, a phenomenon at the center of the *Zhuangzi*'s famous skill stories and vision of living well. She highlights three features in particular: spontaneity as an engaged epistemic attitude, as embodied and in the moment, and as averse to codification. She also draws on ideas and frameworks from contemporary epistemology and the philosophy of action and explores a major potential downside or risk of this sort of spontaneity. In Loubna El Amine's "The Family–State Analogy in the *Mengzi*" (Chapter 14), she takes on the widespread view that for Mengzi, the state is analogous to the family in key respects. Arguing for a far more circumscribed interpretation of the analogy, she calls attention to important differences between the two social units in order to clarify how much each is (and is not) defined by notions of obedience, heredity, and patriarchy.

p. xxi A final set of chapters moves beyond core issues and calls attention to important but heretofore neglected themes in foundational texts. These include Erin M. Cline's "Kongzi as Therapeutic Philosopher" (Chapter 11). In this chapter, Cline argues that the Kongzi (Confucius) of the *Analects* models a kind of philosophy that is unmistakably meant to be therapeutic and not just theoretical, and she shows how his practices both stand apart from therapeutic philosophy in the West and provide a more coherent and unitary picture of the good life as Kongzi envisions it. In Hagop Sarkissian's "Virtuous Contempt (*wù* 惡) in the *Analects*" (Chapter 10), he takes on a topic that some present-day scholars are tempted to downplay or ignore, which concerns the proper objects of virtuous contempt and the attitudes it comprises. Sarkissian uses his reading of the *Analects* not only to piece together the text's implicit account of virtuous contempt but also to defend the view that despising or holding others in contempt (done rightly) can be morally laudable. In Eirik Lang Harris's "The *Dao* of HAN Fei" (Chapter 15), he looks at the important role of the cosmic *dao* (understood as something that underlies natural and human processes) in the Legalist classic known as the *HAN Feizi* 韓非子. As Harris shows, a

close reading HAN Fei's views on cosmic *dao* both justifies and elucidates his distinctive vision of the bureaucratic state as a mechanistic, Leviathan-like entity and the ruler as "phantom oiler" of the machinery.

ii. Chinese Buddhism

Although Buddhist missionaries had some presence in China as early as the first century CE, Buddhism did not really enter the intellectual and religious mainstream until the tumultuous Six Dynasties Period (ca. 220–589 CE), and it was eventually patronized by the emperors who presided over a unified China in the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE). The Tang dynasty period is often regarded as a heyday for Buddhist philosophy, at which time competing philosophical schools or lineages arose, and many literati treated Buddhist thought as a scholastic pursuit. For some anglophone philosophers in the 21st century, Tang dynasty Buddhist thought can both attract and frustrate. On the one hand, some of the texts better align with what people who now take and teach philosophy courses in English tend to expect, making familiar logical moves (e.g., *reductio ad absurdum* arguments) and focusing on issues like inference, perception, mereology (part–whole relations), and the metaphysics of personal identity. On the other hand, some of the most influential philosophical treatises are highly technical, brimming with terms of art, and were intended (like much of present-day anglophone philosophy) for audiences that were already conversant with the concepts and terminology.

Providing anglophone philosophers with points of entry to Chinese Buddhism is thus not easily done, but this volume has been helped by three specialists who both have a deep grasp of the historical texts and also write clearly and accessibly about the philosophical issues. In Nicholaos Jones's "Harmonizing Chinese Buddhist Ethics" (Chapter 8), he explains how philosophers in the
p. xxii Huayan 華嚴 school of Buddhism succeed at creating an ethics in which the various subcomponents (theses, precepts, stages of ↳ practice, and achievements) meet the indigenous Chinese ideal of "harmonizing" with one another, understood broadly as mutually supporting and complementing one another. The chapter serves both as a rare systematic accounting of Chinese Buddhist ethics and as a helpful way of understanding the coherent justifications and motives that underwrite so much Buddhist ethics in China. In Tao JIANG's "When Buddha Nature Was Not Buddha Nature: *Fo'xing*, *Shen*, and the Birth of a Universal Mind in Early Medieval China" (Chapter 16), he recounts the history of the idea of Buddha Nature (*Fóxìng* 佛性), a notion that barely figures in the Buddhism of South Asia but is often regarded as one of the most important and distinctively Chinese ideas in the Buddhism of East Asia. Roughly, Buddha Nature refers to a universally shared source of enlightenment, a kind of ultimate reality that cannot be described in language or understood in conceptual terms, and (for some Chinese Buddhists) a universal mind. In Li KANG's "How It All Depends: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Huayan Buddhism" (Chapter 17), she provides a uniquely accessible reconstruction of Huayan views on ontological dependence, understood as the relation between (for example) a smile and the face that wears it or a loaf of bread and its constitutive arrangement of chemical elements. A great deal of Huayan philosophy's most provocative theses turn on the claim that everything ontologically depends on everything else, and Kang both gives a charitable reconstruction of the arguments for that claim and also calls attention to a shortcoming of the arguments, drawing in part on Kit Fine's essence-based account of dependence.

iii. Confucian Philosophy after Buddhism

For at least the last seven centuries and up to the present day, philosophically minded people in East Asia who identify as Confucians have tended to articulate their views in terms that come from philosophers who lived more than a millennium after the time of Kongzi (Confucius) and Mengzi (Mencius). Much of what is now regarded as standard Confucian doctrine in metaphysics, epistemology, and moral psychology was developed not by the classical Confucians but, rather, by thinkers who sought to defend a coherent Confucian alternative to Buddhism. Ostensibly, many of these thinkers wanted to reaffirm the importance of ethics and human relationships over Buddhist nonattachment and personal salvation. But in the course of doing so, they also developed their own distinctive metaphysics, theories of knowledge and action, technical terminology, and practices of mental discipline. They also developed a vocabulary of moral psychology and moral knowledge that is arguably unrivaled by any other historical tradition. Today, philosophers and historians in East Asia regard ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) as the two philosophical giants of this Confucian reaction to Buddhism, but there were many hundreds of influential writers and teachers who shared common cause with thinkers like Zhu and Wang. In English, they are often called "neo-Confucians."

The heydays of neo-Confucianism are often said to be the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, but two of the
p. xxiii canonical texts that were particularly important ↳ for neo-Confucianism were written much earlier. These are the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) and the *Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), which are the topic of Bryan W. Van Norden's "Moral Failure, Ethical Roles, and Metaphysics in the *Great Learning* and the *Mean*" (Chapter 9). Van Norden describes some of the most influential remarks, metaphors, and ideas in the two texts, including the *Mean*'s distinctive "role-based" formulations of the Golden Rule, the *Great Learning*'s account of sincerity as a necessary feature of virtue, and a passage from the *Great Learning* that inspired ZHU Xi's and WANG Yangming's competing views about weakness of will.

This volume has additional two chapters on ZHU Xi, the great systematizer and synthesizer of many competing strands of neo-Confucian thought in the Song dynasty. In the period of 1313–1315, ZHU Xi's interpretation of the Confucian classics became the basis for the civil service exam, and Zhu's philosophy itself became a kind of orthodoxy all over China ever after (and eventually in Korea as well). Zhu is often credited for articulating a systematic metaphysics, according to which the natures (*xìng* 性) of individual things—including the natures of individual human beings—are formless or metaphysical entities. This sort of metaphysical account came to be seen as problematic when the success of the natural sciences led many to doubt that existence of metaphysical entities or principles. In the chapter by Yong HUANG, "ZHU Xi's Neo-Confucian Metaphysics of Human Nature: Explanatory, Not Foundational" (Chapter 18), he argues that Zhu's metaphysics isn't so difficult to reconcile with a naturalistic worldview after all. Huang distinguishes between "foundational" and "explanatory" metaphysics, the key difference being that the former constructs metaphysical ideas independently of empirical and practical knowledge, while the latter starts with empirical and practical knowledge and proposes that metaphysical entities best explain how the knowledge could be correct or warranted. On Huang's close reading of Zhu, Zhu's metaphysics of human nature turns out to be explanatory and not foundational. In May Sim's "Laozi and ZHU Xi on Knowledge and Virtue" (Chapter 20), she offers a broad picture of what's most interesting and controversial about Zhu's philosophy by contrasting Zhu's views on metaphysical first principles, knowledge, and virtue with the views of Laozi, the legendary Daoist author of the *Daodejing*. A pivotal difference between the two concerns the role of knowledge in instantiating virtue—for Laozi, certain kinds of conventional ethical knowledge interfere with natural virtue, while for Zhu, conventional ethical knowledge is necessary in order to act for the right purposes and in the right way. Sim shows how this core disagreement coheres with and helps explain both subtle and overt disagreements on numerous other issues, and she spells out criticisms that each figure could justifiably bring against the other.

The great neo-Confucian philosopher WANG Yangming is known for many memorable theses and arguments but is perhaps most famous for what has come to be called the doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action (*zhī xíng hé yī* 知行合一). A tremendous amount of ink has been spilled on attempts to explain how, exactly, Wang can plausibly hold that knowledge and action are unified—
p. xxiv for example, how knowing that a certain act is virtuous could be unified with so acting or so intending to act. In ↳ Waldemar Brys's "Knowing-To in WANG Yangming" (Chapter 21), he offers an elegant interpretation of this doctrine by reading the relevant sort of knowledge as "knowing-to" (as opposed to other kinds of knowledge attribution, such as knowing-how or knowing-that). In the course of spelling out this interpretation, Brys explains how his reading of Wang differs from Yong HUANG's reading (who also uses "knowing-to" to explain Wang's unity of knowledge and action) and points to a way that Wang's doctrine can solve a long-standing problem in the philosophy of action (the problem of deviant formal causation).

With more than two and a half millennia of Chinese philosophy to cover and a relatively small number of people writing on the postclassical tradition in English, this volume necessarily omits some important periods and figures. Other important philosophical movements that more or less go untouched include Neo-Daoism, Confucian and syncretistic thought in the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), and Confucian thought in the Tang dynasty. Two more important philosophical movements include the rise of *evidential studies* (*kǎozhèng xúe* 考證學) in the late imperial period and what we might call *contemporary Chinese philosophy* after Chinese intellectuals began engaging in earnest with Western philosophy. Two chapters in this volume offer points of entry into the thought of leading philosophers in these last two movements. The most influential philosopher in the evidential studies movement was the Qing dynasty Confucian DAI Zhen (1724–1777), who had no access to modern philosophy in Europe but is nevertheless characterized by some historians as China's first major "modern" thinker. In "DAI Zhen on the Common Affirmability of Ethical Judgments" (Chapter 4), I look closely at Dai's claim that sound ethical judgments can be distinguished from mere personal opinions by determining whether they align with "what heart-minds affirm in common." Contrary to some other readings of this criterion, I suggest that it is best understood as part of an effort to make moral epistemology more democratic in the broad sense that it requires

all people (especially the powerful) to give more consideration to the views and interests of ordinary people, a characterization that I spell out in a number of specific ways. In David Elstein's "Knowledge of Human Nature and Morality in Contemporary Confucianism" (Chapter 22), he looks at how four 20th- and 21st-century philosophers of Confucianism draw on both Western and Chinese philosophical methods to address long-standing issues in Chinese thought, focusing in particular on the famous Mengzian thesis that human nature is good. Elstein classifies the methods of two contemporary philosophers as broadly introspective and the methods of two others as broadly empirical, and he notes how both the introspective and the empirical methods fail in some key respect to do the work that Mengzi's philosophical agenda sets for them. Here we get a glimpse of how Chinese philosophy has developed in this most recent period of engagement with Western thought. Quite arguably, however, most of the chapters in this volume are also demonstrations of this sort of engagement, since nearly all of the authors themselves draw upon arguments and language that comes from both traditions.

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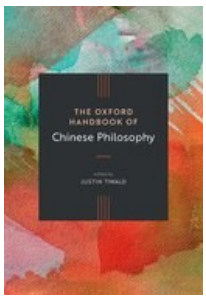
III. Editorial Conventions

Having just presented the contributions in terms of three broad historical "movements" (for the sake of giving readers a sense of the history of Chinese philosophy), in what follows the chapters are organized quite differently. In the interest of helping readers find works on issues important to them, the volume is divided into six parts, each of which is defined by a particular philosophical subfield or topic broadly construed. The topics are (1) the foundations of ethics, (2) ethics and value, (3) philosophical psychology, (4) politics, (5) metaphysics, and (6) knowledge. It almost goes without saying that some chapters contain substantial discussions of multiple such topics, in which case I had to rely on my own (flawed) judgment about the sort of readership that would be most motivated to read a particular chapter. Within each part, chapters are ordered chronologically according to the texts or philosophers they discuss. Every contribution (including my own) was reviewed anonymously and eventually approved for publication by another expert in the field.

For readers who straddle both the Chinese and the Western academic worlds, it is sometimes hard to tell from romanized text alone whether a Chinese name is being presented in the Chinese sequence (family name, then personal name) or the Western sequence (personal name, then family name). Figures in Chinese history usually have their names presented in the Chinese sequence, but some Chinese scholars who actively publish in Western languages can have their names presented in either sequence. In the interest of properly identifying the authors, wherever a *full* Chinese name appears, the family name is in SMALL CAPS. For example, the use of small caps in "DAI Zhen" indicates that "Dai" is the family name and "Zhen" is the personal name. When just one part of the name is referenced, I have followed the practice of referring to the person by family name alone (e.g., "Dai believed … "). When a hybrid name is used (e.g., "Christina Ng") the personal name precedes the family name.

Citing traditional Chinese texts always poses a challenge for edited volumes like this one. My research assistant (Sihao CHEW) and I have standardized the citation format of certain canonical texts (such as the *Analects* and the *Mengzi*). However, there are many other historical texts for which there are not yet well-established conventions of citation, in which case the authors have specified their own conventions in the notes to their chapters.

I have also allowed authors some discretion in including or omitting tone marks when giving romanizations of Chinese characters (e.g., *ren* or *rén* for the character 仁). At minimum, when the romanization of a Chinese character appears in a specific chapter for the first time, we have insisted on or added tone marks for those "first appearances," making exceptions only for names (e.g., names of people or texts). Some authors have chosen to add tone marks for names as well, and some even for later "repeat appearances" of
p. xxvi romanizations already presented. Sometimes a strategic use ↳ of tone marks has helped authors signal to readers that they are referring to different characters, as when distinguishing between *yí* for 宜 (appropriate, suitable) and *yì* for 義 (right, righteous). In these matters, as in many others too numerous to detail, I have tried to strike a balance between imposing some stylistic consistency and permitting the contributors to use their own best judgment.



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CHAPTER

1 A Theological Voluntarist Consequentialism in the *Mozi*

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Abstract

This chapter argues that even though there is an important sense in which the doctrine of the Mozi "Core Chapters" has a consequentialist structure and employs a consequentialist criterion for demarcating moral conduct, it has an irreducible theological voluntarist foundation. For the Mohists, it is Heaven's will that makes it the case that a *dao* is moral. This is so both on account of Heaven being all wise and because of its status as the highest-ranking ruler of the human world. Nevertheless, there remains a close connection between morality and the welfare for the world so much so that given the Mohists' account, taking Heaven's will as an epistemic criterion of morality is operationally equivalent to taking the welfare of the world as such a criterion. The chapter closes by proposing that in including the appeal to Heaven's will in their account of morality, the Mohists were groping toward explaining two features of morality. These include the connection between morality and taking an impartial (or at least all-inclusive) point of view, and the fact that morality somehow imposes weighty and authoritative demands upon human agents that transcend a merely self-regarding concern with our well-being.

Keywords: theological voluntarism, consequentialism, Mozi, Chinese ethics, moral foundations
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
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I. Introduction

At a glance, the doctrine of the *Mozi* "Core Chapters" seems to imply a consequentialist conception of morality.[1] Indeed, the Mohists' first-order ethical and political proposals are regularly argued for in these chapters on the basis that they bring about a type of good consequence—they promote the welfare of the world. Conversely, practices are denounced on the basis that they harm the world. But the arguments are seldom simply that such and such should be done because doing it will benefit the world, or that such and such should be stopped because it harms the world. There is often an overtly *moral* dimension to the argument: the Mohists' larger point is that because doing such and such will promote the welfare of the world, it is the *moral* thing to do. If this conclusion is right, the Mohists would be among the earliest proponents of an explicitly consequentialist conception of morality in the history of world philosophy.

Nonetheless, there exist intriguing textual considerations that complicate the picture. For the triad of chapters titled "Heaven's Will" (Chapters 26–28 of the *Mozi*) suggest that the Mohists have a theological voluntarist conception of morality (often called a "divine command" conception of morality; see Section II of this chapter). This is, roughly speaking, the view that the will of a deity—in the Mohist case, Heaven's will (*tiānzhì* 天志)—determines the moral valence of conduct. Consequently, some writers have either been prompted to propose that we should suspend our judgment on whether the Mohists espouse some form of consequentialism, since
p. 4 there is just as much evidence that they subscribe to a theological voluntarist conception of morality (Ahern ↳ 1976), or have urged outright that the Mohists espoused theological voluntarism (Soles 1999; Johnson 2011). Other readers of the *Mozi* have also joined the debate to defend the consequentialist interpretation (Vorenkamp 1992; Duda 2001; Van Norden 2007; Fraser 2010).

This chapter will argue that even granting that Mohist moral doctrine can be understood as a variety of consequentialism taken as a first-order ethical doctrine, it also has a theological voluntarist *meta-ethical* foundation. The main piece of textual evidence lies in the text's description of the "structure of power in the world" in which Heaven is portrayed as the ultimate ruler of the human world and in some sense determining the standards of conduct meant to regulate the human collective, that is, what the Mohists equate with "morality" (Section III). Nonetheless, Mohists' overall position is a complex one, for there remains a close connection between morality and the welfare for the world even in the very passages about Heaven's will (Section IV). Furthermore, though the Mohists themselves highlight Heaven's will as an *epistemic* criterion of morality, it can be shown that taking it as such a criterion is operationally equivalent to taking the welfare of the world as the criterion (Section V). Nonetheless, the Mohists do present Heaven's will as playing an irreducible role in their conception of morality, and enough of such a role to qualify their position as a theological voluntarist one, given suitable qualifications. In the final section (Section VI), I propose that by appealing to Heaven's will, the Mohists were highlighting—and groping toward explaining—at least two features of morality: the connection between morality and taking an impartial (or at least all-inclusive) point of view, and the fact that morality somehow imposes weighty and authoritative demands upon human agents that transcend a merely self-regarding concern with our well-being.

II. Heaven and Theological Voluntarism in the *Mozi*

In order to see if the Mohists have a theological voluntarist conception of morality, a statement of what the position could intelligibly amount to within an early Chinese intellectual context would be needed. By "theological voluntarism," I mean the thesis that the will of a deity irreducibly determines the moral valence of some set of entities—acts, states of affairs, character traits, and so on, or some combination of these (Murphy 2012). Traditionally, this position is often called the "divine command" conception of morality. But since the "will" in any relevant formulation is best understood broadly, allowing for a variety of acts of will (commanding, desiring, loving, hating, intending, etc.), the name "theological voluntarism" is to be preferred (Murphy 2012; see also Quinn 1990). Note, however, that by "voluntarism," the point is only that some sort of act of will (broadly speaking) is involved; there is no commitment
p. 5 as to whether the act of will is contingent or whether it is necessitated by the very nature of the willing agent, or for that matter ↳ whether it involves deliberation or choosing between options. I will further stipulate that the "entities" relevant to our discussion range over *dào* 道—ways of conducting life or organizing the community—and that the relevant status is whether the *dao* in question is a moral (*yì* 義; sometimes *rényì* 仁義 in the *Mozi*; see also Loy 2005: 147–51) *dao*. But most crucially, since "Heaven's will" plays the role occupied by the "will of a deity" in such a formulation, a word about what this term ("Heaven," *tiān* 天) means in the *Mozi* is in order.

The term *tian* in early Chinese texts often simply refers to the sky, that is, the physical heavens, the place above the Earth. Beneath it is the human world—literally "all under Heaven" (*tiānxià* 天下), and the myriad things of the world are said to be "between Heaven and Earth." But the term was also used by the Zhou dynasty (11th century–256 BCE) elite to refer to their tribal god, which they identified with the high god of the defeated Shang dynasty (called *dì* 帝) in propaganda justifying the Zhou conquest of the Shang (See Shaughnessy 1999: 314–17). The Shang, they claimed, lost the "mandate of Heaven" (*tiānmìng* 天命) in the dissoluteness of their last ruler, and Heaven's favor was thus transferred to the virtuous Zhou. (The Zhou remained the de jure ruling house of the civilized world in the Mohists' own time even though actual power had long devolved to the various regional princes. The Zhou high king, the titular ruler of "all under Heaven," is styled *tiānzǐ* 天子, "Son of Heaven.") Toward the later part of the classical period, the same term *tian* will come to mean more and more what we might recognize as an impersonal "nature" in such texts as the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi*, rather than a deity with personal characteristics. The *Mozi* "Core Chapters," however, are better thought of as predating this development (see Knoblock 1994: 3–6).

The references to Heaven in the *Mozi* "Core Chapters" are reminiscent of the Zhou notion of a divine arbiter of worldly affairs, a fact also corroborated by their copious citations of ostensible Zhou (and even pre-Zhou) traditions (see, e.g., 15.7, 19.7, and 31.12). In these chapters, Heaven is consistently portrayed as an agent possessing personal characteristics that exists separately from human beings though intervening in their affairs.[2] It has will and desire (26.2) and is powerfully solicitous of people's welfare (27.5). It is the ruler of the world, superior to even the "Son of Heaven" (28.3; see Section III). It providentially rewards the just and punishes the wicked through natural phenomena (e.g., the weather; 11.4, 27.6), or through its superhuman intermediaries the *guǐshén* 鬼神 ("the spirits") and unnatural portents more generally (19.5–7). Heaven and the spirits are presented as commanding various ancient sage rulers to execute condign punishment upon wicked tyrants by military means and as conferring legitimacy upon various virtuous rulers (19.5–7). Relatedly, Mohists also urge their audience to conduct themselves right so as to avoid the punishment of Heaven, arguing that since Heaven is all seeing, wrongdoers couldn't possibly hope to escape (26.1). Finally, Heaven and the spirits are also presented as proper objects of reverence, sacrificial offerings, and supplication (27.2).

Now, the Heaven of *Mozi* is obviously not to be rashly equated with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Nor are all the attributes
p. 6 associated with the deity of the historic monotheisms—omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipresence, ↳ transcendence, creator of the world, and so on—unambiguously found, though, as we have seen previously, the Mohists do describe Heaven with analogs of some of them. For instance, the Mohists' Heaven is all seeing, supremely benevolent, and responsible for various physical occurrences in the world. On the other hand, it is also much more distant—it is not portrayed as being in a personal relationship with individuals or as inviting people to form such a relationship with it. Though enjoying the favor of Heaven (see, e.g., 15.7), King Wen of Zhou is never said to be an intimate "friend" of his deity the way that Abraham is described in relation to Yahweh (see, e.g., Isaiah 41:8). In general, "Heaven" in early Chinese texts—even in its guise as referring to the Zhou high god—is a thinner and less determinate notion than "God" in historic monotheisms. Nonetheless, the Mohists' Heaven is enough of a *deity* to motivate the possibility that their doctrine could, in principle, imply a form of theological voluntarism.[3]

In many ways, the Mohists' conception of Heaven is consistent with common beliefs within their milieu. For instance, the historical text *Zuozhuan* records people claiming that Heaven is sending calamities upon this or that wayward noble house or that the spirits are displeased with the rulers for their moral and ritual infractions, the implication being that divine punishment is due. But the Mohists also buck prevailing intellectual trends in two ways. First, given subsequent development in which *tian* becomes more and more like "nature" and less and less like "deity," their notion of "Heaven" is on the wane. Second, even discounting this later development, the records suggest an increasing incidence of skepticism regarding Heaven and the spirits among the political elite (Pines 2002: 55). In fact, the Mohists candidly present themselves as speaking to people who do not take the notion of a providential Heaven or punishing spirits seriously both in the "Heaven's Will" chapters, and in "Explaining the Spirits" (*Mozi* Chapter 31).

In any case, given this discussion, an approximation of what a theological voluntarist conception of morality amounts to within an early Chinese intellectual context might go as follows:

(1) Heaven's will irreducibly determines a *dao* to be moral.

Or put another way, the fact that Heaven wills a certain *dao* be practiced by people *makes it the case* or *explains* how the *dao* in question is a moral *dao*, and the relevant determining or explanatory role played by Heaven is not derivative of something more foundational. Now, (1) should not be confused with this related claim:

(2) A *dao* is moral if and only if it accords with Heaven's will.

Affirming (2) is compatible with denying a theological voluntarist conception of morality. Even if all and only such *dao* as accords with Heaven's will are moral, it might yet be the case that it is the possession of some other property that irreducibly *makes* them moral. In fact, I take for granted that the Mohists agree both with (2) and its consequentialist counterpart:

p. 7 (3) A *dao* is moral if and only if practicing it would promote the world's welfare.

But again, affirming (3) is compatible with affirming a theological voluntarist conception of morality as spelt out in (1). Granting that the Mohists affirm either (2) or (3) does not settle the issue as to whether they have a theological voluntarist conception of the foundations of morality.

It is also important not to see more in (1) than is intended. For instance, (1) implies no stance on what does or even ought to motivate human agents to moral conduct, and conversely, what arguments might be produced to urge people to adopt a moral course of actions. In fact, adopting (1) does not imply that people would or should be motivated to act morally when it is pointed out to them that such and such manner of conduct is Heaven's will. Conversely, the fact that the Mohists appeal to consequentialist considerations in urging their audience to adopt a first-order proposal is entirely compatible with their also having a theological voluntarist understanding of the foundations of morality.

Secondly and more importantly, formulation (1), by itself, does not exclude the possibility that other things determine (possibly *over*determine) a *dao* to be moral, for instance, the consequences that would be brought about if the *dao* were practiced, or alternatively, that Heaven's will and the welfare of the world else both determine a *dao* to be moral, though the explanatory contribution made by each is slightly different. Proving that the Mohists affirm a consequentialist foundation to morality thus does not, by itself, contradict a theological voluntarist interpretation of their doctrine, and vice versa (see Section IV). Nonetheless, if (1) is to be truly affirmed of their doctrine, then Heaven's will has to play an irreducible role in the Mohists' conception of morality.

The question now is whether the Mohists affirm or imply (1). For that, we will have to scrutinize the logic of specific arguments in the text.

III. The Structure of Power in the World

The most important piece of textual evidence that Mohist doctrine implies a theological voluntarist conception of morality relates to what Dennis Ahern has dubbed "the structure of power in the world" (Ahern 1976: 190; see also Soles 1999: 25). Consider this passage below from "Heaven's Will" Version C (28.3–4):

> Morality is what is correct. How do we know that morality is what is correct? When morality prevails in the world there is order, when morality does not prevail there is disorder. This is how we know that morality is what is correct. But when it comes to what is correct (alternatively, "correction"), it never comes from those below to rule over those above, but must come from those above to those below to rule over ↳ those below. For this reason the commoners do not get to correct themselves on their own recognizance; there are officers to correct them. The officers do not get to correct themselves on their own recognizance; there are the grand councilors to correct them. The grand councilors do not get to correct themselves on their own recognizance; there are the various princes to correct them. The various princes do not get to correct themselves on their own recognizance; there are the three lords to correct them. The three lords do not get to correct themselves on their own recognizance; there is the Son of Heaven to correct them. The Son of Heaven does not get to correct himself on his own recognizance; there is Heaven to rule over him.

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In brief, the Mohists assert in this and related passages in the other versions of "Heaven's Will" (26.3–4, 27.1–2) that Heaven, the Son of Heaven, the various regional princes and officials, and the common people at large form a hierarchy with Heaven at the apex.[4] Within this hierarchy, agents occupying a higher position get to "correct" (*zhèng* 正, or more generally, "set right"), or "govern" (*zhèng* 政, in Versions A and B) those below. Here, note the identification of "morality" with "what is correct" (or "what governs" in Versions A and B). The way to make sense of this equivalence is to see the Mohists as assuming that morality is as if the standards of conduct meant to regulate the whole human collective in light of which the superiors' correcting or governing of the subordinates is to be done, such that the state of people complying with it (i.e., when morality prevails in the world) just is the human collective being in an orderly and well-governed state.

Now, the passage *could* just be saying that superiors in the hierarchy get to *enforce* an independently defined set of standards upon those beneath them. But this does not seem to be all that is implied. The recurring locution "the Xs do not get to correct themselves on their own recognizance; there are the Ys to correct them" suggests those below don't get to *set* the standards that apply to themselves; the standards are set by those above. That this additional dimension is involved is also corroborated by the Mohists' account in the "Exalting Unity" (alternatively, "Conforming Upwards") series of chapters (*Mozi*, Chapters 11–13) in which people from lower down the hierarchy are urged to conform their conception of morality to that of those above, and ultimately, everyone's conception to Heaven (see, e.g., 11.1–4).

A second ambiguity is whether at the apex of the hierarchy, Heaven sets the standards in the sense that it *decides* what those standards are, or it functions as the exemplar. Though the second possibility need not be discounted, the first coheres with the recurrent references to Heaven's *will* or Heaven's *intent* (*tiān yì* 天意) in relation to the contents of morality throughout the "Heaven's Will" chapters. For instance, the person who fails to act morally is said not to accord with Heaven's will or intent, rather than said not to accord with Heaven simply (see, e.g., 26.4). Bryan Van Norden has noted that the passages regarding the world hierarchy do not contain the usual Chinese words for deciding or choosing (such as *zé* 擇; 2007: 147). But notice the Mohists' own summation—that "morality issues from Heaven" (*yì zì tiān chū* 義自天出; 27.2, 28.4). The formulation parallels the locution used in *Analects* 16.2 to talk about how, when the Way prevails in the world, music and military expeditions "issue from" the Son of Heaven rather than ↳ the various princes. Presumably, whatever else is going on in the *Analects* passage, part of the point made regards who gets to *decide* what ritual forms are performed when, what military operations are undertaken, when and where, and so on. In all, the overall point of the passage in the *Mozi* is that Heaven as the supreme apex of the world hierarchy determines the contents of morality in the sense that the standards of conduct that apply to the human collective are identified with morality *because* it has the backing of Heaven's intention.

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Against an interpretation of this sort, Kristopher Duda argues that the sort of "determining" ascribed to Heaven need not support a theological voluntarist interpretation (Duda 2001: 25–27). For in the sequel to the passage quoted in the previous paragraph (28.4), it turns out that morality issues from Heaven because Heaven is wisest and most noble in the world. Version B elaborates further (27.3; cf. 26.4):

> If morality prevails in the world there will be order, if morality does not prevail there will be disorder; this is how we know that morality just is good governance. As for the stupid and base, they should not govern the noble and wise. There needs be the noble and wise and then they can govern the stupid and base. This is how we know that morality does not issue from the stupid and base but must issue from the noble and wise.

Making the argument explicit:

(4) If morality prevails in the world, there would be order; but if morality does not prevail in the world, there would be disorder.

(5) Morality just is good governance. (From [4])

(6) The noble and wise should govern the stupid and base and not vice versa. (From [4] and [5])

(7) Heaven is noblest and wisest.

(8) Morality issues from Heaven. (From [6] and [7])

Duda's point is that Heaven's will does not *make* the relevant *dao* moral as much as it is the case that Heaven wisely *figures out* which *dao* is moral. He gives the analogy of a mathematician deciding what the right answer to a mathematical problem is. Since the mathematician's role was "merely to discover the answer to a question that exists independently of her will," so likewise, it would seem that Heaven's determinations are only tracking a morality that is independent of its will.

But the objection is not persuasive. First, consider this extension of Duda's analogy. Suppose Kurt is sitting for his calculus examinations. At one level, since the right answers to the exam questions exist independently of his will, Kurt's role was merely to discover them. But this is compatible with an interest in the answer as *being from Kurt*. If Kurt did well in the exams, it's not just because the answers are *right* but because they are *his* answers. Had he written down the wrong answers, he would have been graded down. Had the answers been right but they were given by someone else, the grade would not have been awarded to Kurt. The graders are interested in the answers that can be ↳ traced back to Kurt's intention and action, that is, Kurt's will. All this still holds even if Kurt simply never entertains any answer apart from the one he put down whether because of his intelligence or stubbornness. In fact, it will still hold even if Kurt is infallible, though in such a case, the examiners' role is conceivably not so much that of grading or evaluating as affirming and praising *Kurt* for *his* infallibility.

What the extended analogy tells us is this: suppose we grant that there is an objectively right answer to the question "What are the standards of conduct such that if people were to comply with them, the world would be well ordered?"—an answer that is independent of Heaven's will. In relation to *this* question, Heaven's role is that of wisely finding out an independently existing answer. But all this would still be compatible with the additional claim that it is *Heaven*'s deciding that such should be the standard of conduct for the human collective that *makes it* the moral *dao*. To give a further analogy: suppose there are two equally brilliant legal scholars Abel and Baker, and a legal case about which we shall stipulate that there is an objectively right judgment that exists independently of their will. At one level, theirs was "merely" to discover this independently existing answer. Since both are equally brilliant, they are both able to figure out the right answer. But even so, it could still be that the judgment that is traced to Abel's and not to Baker's will is the one that sends someone to jail, overturns a lower court's ruling, or orders a government agency to suspend their activities, and so on—because while Abel is the judge presiding over the case in court, his friend Baker is just an observer.

That this second focus on the fact that it was *Heaven*'s deciding and not just the wisdom of what was decided that mattered to the Mohists is signaled by their ascribing a second attribute to Heaven in the relevant passages: Heaven's superior rank (*guì* 貴). (This aspect of the Mohists' account is ignored by Duda.) Their dual emphasis on both Heaven's wisdom and its rank suggests that it's not just the *right answer* to the question "What are the standards of conduct such that if people were to comply with them, the world would be well ordered?" that is at stake. The answer also needs to come from the *holder of the right status*. In short, Duda's proposed objection against the theological voluntarist interpretation does not hold.

IV. Heaven's Will, Morality, and the Welfare of the World

This is not to say that there aren't elements in the text that could conceivably be used against the theological voluntarist interpretation of Mohist doctrine. Consider this passage below (26.2):

> Now, what does Heaven desire and what does it abhor? Heaven desires morality and abhors immorality…. But how do we know that Heaven desires morality and abhors immorality? The answer: When morality prevails in the world there is

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> life ↳ but when morality does not prevail there is death; when morality prevails in the world there is wealth but when morality does not prevail there is poverty. When morality prevails in the world there is order but when morality does not prevail there is disorder. But Heaven desires that there be life and abhors that there be death; that there be wealth and abhors that there be poverty; that there be order and abhors that there be disorder. This is how we know that Heaven desires morality and abhors immorality.

The first thing to note concerns the lines that say "Heaven desires morality and abhors immorality." The line is best understood as a shorthand, since, from the context of the argument in the passage as a whole, it's clear that what the Mohists are referring to is "Heaven desires that morality prevails in the world and abhors that it does not prevail in the world." With this in mind, a streamlined version of the argument in the passage may be formulated thus:

(9) The welfare of the world would be promoted if and only if morality prevails in the world.

(10) Heaven desires that the welfare of the world be promoted.

(11) Heaven desires that morality prevails in the world and abhors that it does not prevail in the world. (From [9] and [10])

It is not entirely clear if the Mohists meant (10) (and relatedly [11]) to be taken purely extensionally or as introducing an intensional context. On the first, (10) would mean that there is a state of affairs the obtaining of which Heaven desires, and which, as a matter of fact is properly described as "the welfare of the world is promoted." On the second, it would mean that Heaven desires that the description "the welfare of the world is promoted" be instantiated. Technically, on the second, intensional reading, the argument is invalid. (Given that Edward's murderer is his butler, and Holmes is looking for Edward's murderer, we can't safely deduce that Holmes is looking for Edward's butler—Holmes might have wrongly thought that Edward's housemaid is the murderer.) But this is easily fixed if we can also assume Heaven knows that (9), presumably a point the Mohists would easily grant given Heaven's wisdom.

The more crucial thing to note is the strong connection made between morality and the welfare of the world in (9), and the role that the premise plays in the argument. How this plays out for the theological voluntarist interpretation of Mohist doctrine, however, depends on what "morality" in (9) (and thus the conclusion [11]) refers to. One possible reading would be to take the "morality" in (9) as referring to *morality as such*, and thus the whole premise as asserting a *conceptual* relationship between morality prevailing and the welfare of the world being promoted. But if so, the passage as a whole would seem to suggest that the Mohists do not hold to a theological voluntarist conception of morality. This is because on this reading, the point of the passage becomes: We (the Mohists) deduce that Heaven desires that morality prevail because of an antecedent conception of what makes a *dao* moral (i.e., that it
p. 12 promotes the welfare of the world), ↳ and our prior knowledge that Heaven desires the welfare of the world. Or so it would seem (but see further discussion).

To defend the theological voluntarist interpretation, Daniel Johnson (2011: 356–67) proposes a reading that takes the "morality" in (9) (and [11]) to be "some conception of morality," that is, any putatively moral *dao*. Now, the Mozi text does use the term in this manner elsewhere (see, e.g., 11.1, 12.1, and 13.2), and the proposal blocks the ostensible problem posed by the first reading. But it is hard to see why the Mohists would grant the *truth* of premise (9) and consequently the soundness of their own argument on this reading of the term—it would amount to them saying that as long as any *putatively* moral *dao* prevails in the world, the world's welfare would be promoted.

But there is a third possibility overlooked by Johnson. The "morality" in (9) (and thus [11]) could refer to the true morality, understood not intensionally as "the moral *dao*, whatever its substantive contents are," but extensionally as whatever specific ways of conduct that instantiate the moral *dao*. For Mohists, this would be equivalent to the *dao* spelt out by the collection of their own considered first-order moral proposals. (Consider the ambiguity regarding what the statement "The answer to this mathematical problem" refers to. The equivalent of the first reading would be as if a placeholder for whatever the right answer is as it is defined with reference to the problem. The equivalent of the second, the one favored by Johnson, would be anything put forward as an answer to the problem, whether correct or not. The equivalent of the third would be the actual numerical value or values that correctly solve the problem.) The point of the passage now becomes: We (the Mohists) deduce that Heaven desires that true morality —that is, the Mohist *dao*—prevails in the world on account of our confidence that the Mohist *dao*, if practiced, would promote the

welfare of the world, and our prior knowledge that Heaven desires the welfare of the world. On this reading, what *makes* the *dao* in question the moral *dao* is left unanswered, which also means that the passage will pose no threat to the theological voluntarist interpretation of Mohism. Given the availability of this reading, the passage does not constitute unambiguous evidence against the theological voluntarist interpretation.

Actually, even the first reading of "morality" in (9) need not imply a negative conclusion. Suppose that, given the conceptual connection between morality as such prevailing in the world and the welfare of the world being promoted as indicated by this construal of (9), we extract this notion: the propensity of a *dao* to promote the welfare of the world if practiced makes it the moral *dao*. But this does not, by itself, rule out the possibility that there is a theological voluntarist conception of morality in the picture as well. Consider the following analogy. Suppose a certain unit of length, let's say, a *cubit*, is by sovereign decree exactly such and such length. In other words, we have just stipulated that it was the sovereign's will that *made* the cubit measure such and such a length. But suppose it is also the case that the length of the cubit so defined stands in a certain necessary relationship with another, preexisting, unit of measurement—it is exactly seven *palms*. (The sovereign authority—wisely, as it were—has that relation in mind.) So, when answering the question as to what *makes* the length measures a cubit, both the sovereign decree and the fact that the
p. 13 length in question is equivalent to seven ↳ palms are proper answers. Nonetheless, without the sovereign's will that such a length *be a cubit*, the cubit as unit for measuring standard does not exist—this despite the fact that the *length* measured by a cubit continues to be equivalent to seven palms.[5]

In sum, none of the proposed readings of what "morality" refers to in (9) (and [11]) pose a genuine threat to the theological voluntarist interpretation of Mohist doctrine. In a sense, the outcome mentioned is the result of a more general set of considerations. On the framework adopted for this study, showing that Mohism affirms that the claim that the propensity of a *dao* to promote the world's welfare *makes* it the moral dao is not enough for proving that they don't also have a theological voluntarist conception of morality, and vice versa (Section II).

V. Heaven, the Moral Compass

A third type of passage that seems to speak in favor of a theological voluntarist interpretation of Mohist doctrine is an analogy, varieties of which can be found in each of the three chapters titled "Heaven's Will" (26.8, 27.10, and 28.9). While there are differences in wording, the key points are very consistent across the chapters: Heaven's will is analogous to the set square and compass of the carpenter and wheelwright. These artisans use their respective instruments to measure and check objects, to see if they are properly square or round. If the object coincides with the tool, it checks out as properly square or round; else, it doesn't. Heaven's will is to be used in a like manner to check and measure people's conduct and even doctrines—if they are in accord with Heaven's will, they check out as good and moral; if they oppose Heaven's will, they are shown to be bad and immoral. The passages have been cited in support of the conclusion that the Mohists espouse a theological voluntarist conception of morality (Ahern 1976; Soles 1999; Johnson 2011). But as we shall see, the situation is more complicated.

The main problem with citing the analogy in support of the theological voluntarist interpretation is that the passages basically say that Heaven's will is like the means by which we can come to *know* whether some course of conduct or doctrine thereof is moral or not, just as the measuring tools are the means by which the artisans can come to know whether something is round or not, square or not. The Mohists call such a tool a "model" (*fǎ* 法; 26.8, 27.10), or "standard and model" (*yí fǎ* 儀法; 28.9)—that is, an epistemic criterion—for the respective properties of roundness, squareness, or for that matter, morality. In fact this analogy of the set square and compass fits in with the Mohists' larger interest in epistemic criteria for morality (Loy 2008; Fraser 2010).[6] In the "Against Fatalism" triad of chapters, they urge that attempts to resolve moral disputes in the absence of "standards" (*yí* 儀) are exercises in futility. They propose three such standards, introducing them as "gauges" (*biǎo* 表; 35.3), or "models" (*fǎ* 法; 36.1, 37.1) for doctrines (*yán* 言, i.e., verbal formulations of putative *dao*; see Loy 2011).

The three gauges generally acknowledged are (a) the propensity of a doctrine, if practiced, to promote people's welfare, (b) the
p. 14 example and teachings of the ancient sage ↳ kings, and (c) what the common people heard and saw; and of these, (a) and (b) are readily understood to be epistemic criteria for morality. The point, however, is not that Heaven's will is another "gauge of doctrine" (even though "the will of Heaven and the Spirits, the affairs of the sage kings" is mentioned as a gauge once in 36.1). Rather, it is

that Heaven's will has at least as good a claim to be something the Mohist recognize as epistemic criterion for morality as the gauges of doctrine in "Against Fatalism." If anything, the fact that Heaven's will gets its own discussion in a separate series of chapters suggests that it might be even more important as an epistemic criterion for morality than the others. In sum, what the analogy of set square and compass implies is roughly this:

(12) Knowledge (or reasonable belief) that a *dao* accords with Heaven's will gives epistemic assurance that it is moral.

This is related to but not exactly the same as a theological voluntarist conception of morality:

(1) Heaven's will irreducibly determines a *dao* to be moral.

Put simply, (1) and (12) are not mutually entailing. Suppose checking if a *dao* accords with Heaven's will is the way for human knowers to find out if it is moral; even then, it could still be the possession of some other property that actually *makes* that the *dao* moral. Conversely, even if accordance with Heaven's will *makes* it the case that a *dao* is moral, it may yet be that in order to find out if a *dao* is moral our best hope is to check whether it has another property. That the Mohists themselves would be sensitive to such a distinction can be discerned from the fact that the deeds and teachings of the ancient sage kings, too, are among the standards and models of morality in "Against Fatalism" (see also 19.1). But it turns out that who counts as a sage king is defined in terms of their promoting the world's welfare (14.1), and their conforming their conduct to Heaven's will (26.4–5, 27.8–9, 28.7). In other words, even though the conduct and orders of the ancient sage kings provide human knowers with a way to find out what the course of morality is, it is not the fact that the ancient sages conducted themselves so that *makes* the way of conduct in question moral.

The distinction between (1) and (12) explains why assigning an epistemic role to Heaven's will is usually something done by writers *opposed* to a theological voluntarist interpretation (see, e.g., Duda 2001: 24–25; Fraser 2010). In their mind, if it can be shown that *all* the Mohists have in mind is (12), the claim that they hold to (1) would then be weakened. This is correct; but conversely, since (12) is consistent with (1), showing that the Mohists accept (12) would not count against their having accepted (1) as long as the latter point can be independently shown.

While the analogy of the set square and compass does not directly support the theological voluntarist interpretation of the Mohists' doctrine, it does reveal interesting features of the doctrine. To see this, we need to take a detour by considering how Heaven's will
p. 15 functions as an epistemic criterion for morality in Mohist doctrine. In ↳ traditions involving a god or gods, a possible answer to the question "How do we find out if a *dao* accords with the will of god or the gods?" might go: Here is what god or the gods said or revealed, possibly through their prophets or supernatural messengers. Checking to see if a *dao* accords with the will of god or the gods is thus a matter of comparing it against their *communicated* will. But even though the Mohists do sometimes portray Heaven as playing something of a speaking role (see 19.5–8), they make no such appeal when discussing Heaven's will as an epistemic criterion for morality. What they do instead is talk about Heaven's *implied* will or intent as it is manifested through natural and other phenomena.

All three versions of "Heaven's Will" include passages in which the Mohists assert that Heaven cares for (*ài* 愛) the people of the world. They infer the notion on the basis of certain observations about the world (26.6, 27.6, 28.5–7). One observation is that Heaven impartially, or all-inclusively, provides natural resources for human use and is responsible for arrangements in nature beneficent to human life (e.g., the orderly procession of the four seasons). Another is that Heaven receives the reverence and sacrifices from all the people of the world without discrimination. A third is that Heaven instituted arrangements for rewarding the good and punishing the wicked. Now, I will set aside the question as to whether the Mohists' observations and interpretations thereof are acceptable to us. The crucial point here is that—whether their arguments are sound or not—the Mohists do draw a certain conclusion regarding what Heaven's will or intent amounts to since the mentioned observations are put forward to answer the following question: How do we know what Heaven's attitude toward the world consists in? The Mohists' answer is that Heaven's will or intent consists in its impartially or all inclusively caring for the welfare of the world. An interesting implication follows from this.

Since Heaven's implied will toward the world consists in its caring for the welfare of the world, a *dao* that is in accord with Heaven's will (that the welfare of the world be promoted) will also be a *dao* that, if practiced, would promote the world's welfare. This means that once the Mohists' account of the content of Heaven's implied will is held fixed, using Heaven's will as the epistemic

criterion for morality is operationally equivalent to using the promotion of the world's welfare to do the same. The two criteria will demarcate the same sorts of conduct as the moral *dao*. In other words, in presenting Heaven as the model and standard for morality, what the Mohists are asking is that we measure conduct in terms of whether they promote the world's welfare.

This state of affairs is not surprising. As previously mentioned (Section II), Mohist doctrine was formulated in a milieu in which the social and political elite (i.e., the main target of Mohist persuasion) has become largely skeptical regarding Heaven. If epistemic criteria of interest to the Mohists are meant to be useful for adjudicating moral dispute—where the opposite party does not already subscribe to Mohist views about Heaven—Heaven's will as an epistemic criterion can only be of limited use (Loy 2008: 466–68). It is thus entirely understandable why the core chapters of the *Mozi* generally do not argue for their first-order proposals by appealing to Heaven's will outside of the "Heaven's Will" triad of chapters. Instead, they consistently and pervasively appeal to the welfare of
p. 16 the world and the example of the ancient sages to justify their proposals. ↳ But all this can now be seen both as granting the fact that Mohist doctrine has a consequentialist character and preserving the claim that there is a theological voluntarist core to the same doctrine.

VI. Remarks on the Mohist Conception of Morality

The argument of the previous sections comes to this: The appeal to Heaven's will is irreducibly a part of the Mohists' account of morality—Heaven, as the apex of the world hierarchy, sets the standards of conduct that is meant to regulate the entire human collective, and so "morality issues from Heaven" (Section III). This conclusion holds despite the existence of elements within that account that are entirely at home within a consequentialist framework (Section IV). And it holds even though, given the Mohists' own account of the *contents* of Heaven's will, human knowers could just as well go about figuring out which *dao* is moral by finding out if the *dao* in question would promote the world's welfare when practiced; in other words, by applying a consequentialist criterion of demarcation (Section V). Now, it is always possible to reinterpret the Mohist account in a more naturalistic spirit given the relative thinness of the Mohist understanding of Heaven (Section II; see Fraser 2015 and the concessions in Johnson 2011: 360–61). Such a move will also draw inspiration from later developments in the classical period where "Heaven" came to mean more and more what we can call "nature." Nonetheless, as the term is used in the Mozi "Core Chapters," it is still more a "deity" with a "will," rather than impersonal "nature," as in the case of *Xunzi*. Thus, the conclusion is that the Mohists' account implies a theological voluntarist conception of morality, that is, the position spelt out in (1).

As indicated previously, the conclusion that the Mohists have a theological voluntarist conception of morality, by itself, does not rule out the possibility that they (also) have, for instance, a consequentialist account of the foundations of morality (Sections II and IV). The more modest claim here is that Heaven's will plays an irreducible role in the Mohists' conception of morality, and that the relationship between Heaven's will and the moral *dao* is not to be explained in terms of something else—Heaven's will as a determinant of morality in the Mohists' doctrine is at least as *basic* as any other putative determinant. Could a more ambitious conclusion—for example, that Heaven's will is *more* basic than any other putative determinant of morality—be drawn? That such might be the case is given apparent support by the consideration that the very content of Heaven's implied will or intent relates exactly to promoting the welfare of the world (Section V). This suggests that promoting the welfare of the world is the moral *dao because* such is Heaven's will. Perhaps, but I am as yet unconvinced. A proper account requires a more comprehensive look at the ostensible consequentialist foundations of Mohism, and that is quite beyond what can be done within the limited space allocated to
p. 17 the present ↳ inquiry. My aim here is to make the best case available for the theological voluntarist interpretation and not to refute the consequentialist interpretation.

In the space that remains, I want to round off my account of the Mohists' theological voluntarism by considering this other question: What is the *motivation* for their introducing Heaven's will into their account of morality? Here, several possibilities are suggested by larger considerations regarding the Mohists' context and the nature of their intellectual project. One is that Mohists' appeal to Heaven and its will could be the outcome of their prior religious convictions: they are true believers in the earlier traditions regarding Heaven as the divine arbiter of human affairs. It is simply a part of their religious sensibility that Heaven is supposed to play a role in their account of morality.[7] On this understanding, the Mohists' aim is not purely philosophical but partly religious. Another possibility relates to the Mohists' opinion that widespread belief in divine support for morality is socially useful and

politically salutary, as it serves to moderate the rapacity of wicked but powerful people who are otherwise not easily restrained by purely human sanctions. With this background in mind—a background that can be reconstructed from, for example, the chapters "Explaining Ghosts" and "Against Military Aggression" Version C (see Wong and Loy 2004)—it is possible to see the Mohist emphasis on Heaven's will as an aspect of a more general attempt to rehabilitate (assuming that they didn't invent it out of whole cloth) the discourse regarding Heaven so as to moderate the effects of the prevailing skepticism among the political elite. On this understanding, the Mohists' aim is not purely theoretical but partly a matter of social-political activism. While I believe that the different dimensions mentioned earlier are present in ancient Mohism, at best, they make the Mohists' appeal to Heaven's will psychologically plausible. They don't actually entail a specific *explanatory* role to Heaven's will in an account of morality. In fact, they are compatible with the possibility that the inclusion of Heaven's will as determining the moral *dao* is *theoretically redundant*. But such a conclusion would be premature.

I believe that the Mohists, in appealing to Heaven in their account of morality, are groping toward explaining at least two features of morality. First, Mohists see a certain *weightiness* or *authority* to morality that is not exhaustively explained in terms of its being about the welfare of the human collective and thus distantly *my* self-regarding concern for my own well-being. Recall the Mohists' identification of morality with the standards of conduct meant to regulate the entire human collective, such that for the world to comply with them just is for it to be orderly and well governed, and thus for its welfare to be promoted (Sections III and IV). Taken on its own, the conception does suggest that morality for the Mohists is very much a human affair and cannot be understood in abstraction from the human desire for order or the human propensity to seek our welfare. But over and above this conception the Mohist adds a theological voluntarist rider: the standards of conduct that constitute morality "issues from Heaven." They are not merely the rules we made up for ourselves but have the imprimatur of an agent superior in intellect and rank over us. Consequently, even though morality is deeply tied to human welfare, it is supposed to carry more than a merely human weight or authority.

p. 18 Second, the Mohists have the intuition that appreciating the demands of morality is, at some level, to adopt the standpoint of Heaven itself and, in some sense, survey the whole without private favor or ill toward the part. The point, however, is not that every individual is to behave in exactly the same way or that each is to treat all in the same manner. Rather, the Mohists' point is that morality applies to all in the human collective, all the way from the bottom to the very top, so to speak. It applies to the Son of Heaven just as much as it applies to the lowliest commoner. The (humanly) powerful are not given leave to flout the standards we are to live by just because they have the ability to do so and get away with it. On this score, notice the Mohists' mentioning of how, when people conduct themselves in accord with Heaven's will, those in charge of large states will not attack those in small states, nor will the strong rob the weak, the noble lord over the base, or the intelligent swindle the foolish (26.7, 27.3, 28.8).

Given present constrains, this is more speculative than probative; it is also not meant to suggest that the Mohists were unique in attempting to deepen aspects of their ethical conception by relating it to Heaven.[8] In fact, it is possible to see the Mohists' theological voluntarism, Mengzi's relating his ethical ideal to "serving Heaven" (*shì tiān* 事天), or for that matter, the later neo-Confucians' moral metaphysics of principle (*lǐ* 理) and matter-energy (*qì* 氣) and discourse on Heaven's (or Nature's) principle (*tiān lǐ* 天理) and human desires (*rén yù* 人欲) as competing attempts to respond to one underlying set of overlapping issues. The Mohists, it would seem, share with many other thinkers in the Chinese tradition the faith that our ethical life is ultimately to be grounded in a "unity between Heaven and human beings" (*tiān rén hé yī* 天人合一), a unity the precise specification of which is a matter of contestation throughout the history of that tradition.[9] The Mohists' theological voluntarism could thus be properly appreciated within this native context, though drawing out the details will require a much longer and harder study.[10]

Notes

1. **For a general introduction to Mozi (fl. late fifth–early fourth century BCE), his followers the Mohists, and the eponymous corpus, see, for example, the introductions to Riegel (2013) and Johnston (2010). The so-called Core Chapters are Chapters 8–37 of the received text, the main repository of the Mohists' ethical and political teachings. These chapters are grouped into ten triads, each being devoted to a single doctrine. The three essays forming the third triad (Chapters 26–28) are the three versions of "Heaven's Will." References to the *Mozi* will be by chapter and paragraph number according to division of the text in the bilingual edition of Johnston (2010). All translations from the Chinese, however, are my own.**

2. For a more detailed presentation of the "human traits" ascribed to Heaven in the "Heaven's Will" chapters of the *Mozi*, see Standaert (2013): 256–59.

3. *Pace* Lu (2006). Here, keep in mind that one of the earliest discussions of a theological voluntarist conception of morality is in Plato's *Euthyphro*, in a context in which the relevant deities are multiple Olympian gods infamous for their mutual bickering, which lack many of the attributes associated with the deity of the historic monotheisms. Socrates's first ↳ refutation of Euthyphro's position—pointing out that the gods are in enmity over what is just, beautiful, ugly, good, and bad—trades exactly on this background (see *Euthyphro* 7b–8b).

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4. The Mohists' picture of the world as a single moral-political hierarchy is likely related to the idealized vision of the early Zhou that became prevalent in Chinese history, for "… The Zhou had given China … a vision: a vision of a world, 'all under heaven,' united in peace and harmony and cooperation, under 'the son of Heaven'" (Creel 1970: 441). Interestingly, Mohists claim that the existence of such a hierarchy up to the Son of Heaven is a matter of common knowledge, except that people are unaware that Heaven forms the ultimate apex of this hierarchy, superior even to the Son of Heaven (see 27.2).

5. One way to flesh out the different explanatory roles played by the sovereign's decree / Heaven's will, on the one hand, and propensity of a *dao* to promote the welfare of the world if practiced, on the other hand, is to see the former as answering to the *source* and the latter as relating to the *bearer* of the relevant status (that it is the moral *dao*, that it is the measuring standard called the *cubit*). For a discussion of the distinction as it relates to issues regarding the grounding of moral status, see Pekka Väyrynen and Simon Kirchin (2013: 170ff). The author credits Derek Baker for alerting him to the issue.

6. Another place in the Mozi where Heaven is presented as an epistemic standard for guiding one's own conduct and for evaluating and judging the conduct of others is Chapter 4, "Models and Standards" (*Fayi* 法儀). See also the analysis in Standaert (2013).

7. For more on the religious dimensions of Mohism and their possible relationship with Mohist philosophy, see, for example, Taylor (1979), Ivanhoe (1998), Goldin (2011), and Fraser (2012).

8. For the Confucian attempts to do the same, see Ivanhoe (2007).

9. The author credits Doil KIM with the points made in this paragraph.

10. An earlier version of the study with a rather different conclusion was presented at the Hong Kong Metaethics Conference in Lingnan University (May 2013), and at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy in Singapore (July 2013), where the author profited from the ensuring discussions. Much of the subsequent work on the study was completed at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, Taipei, while on a sabbatical supported by the National University of Singapore. Derek Baker, Chris Fraser, Winnie Sung, Doil KIM, George Tsai, Nicholas Cai, Daryl OOI Shen, and FANG Wan-chuan read the draft and offered many valuable comments. While I'm sure not everyone is convinced by my arguments, all are to be heartily thanked!

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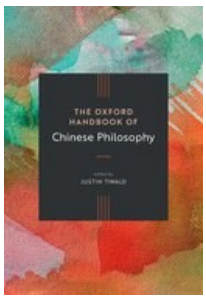

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CHAPTER

2 The Nature of Moral Norms in Xunzi's Philosophy

Philip J. Ivanhoe

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Abstract

This chapter explores a problem in Xunzi's ethical philosophy that has important implications for the nature and status of moral norms. David S. Nivison first recognized the problem, which is that all the best English translations of a well-known passage in the *Xunzi* made it appear that he was contradicting one of his most well-known claims: that "human nature is bad" (*xing'e* 性惡). If we accept the best English translations, then we have to accept that Xunzi contradicts himself on an issue critical to his ethical philosophy. Moreover, how we translate and interpret key parts of this passage carries important implications for contemporary ethical philosophy. In particular, it influences how we understand the nature and status of moral norms.

Keywords: moral norms, sense of duty, human nature, deliberate efforts, social divisions, ritual, evil, cultural artifacts

Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy

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I. Introduction

This chapter explores a problem in Xunzi's ethical philosophy concerning the nature and status of moral norms.[1] By "moral norms" I mean broadly the virtues, principles, expectations, and practices that constitute that realm of human life we recognize as morality. Xunzi believed in the virtue of perseverance, the principle of fairness in choosing candidates to serve in government offices, expectations of civility and decorum in social interactions, and the regular practice of a large number of traditional Confucian rituals; these are examples, respectively, of what I mean by *the virtues, principles, expectations, and practices that constitute that realm of human life we recognize as morality*. The problem I shall focus on was raised most clearly by David S. Nivison (1996), who posed it as a set of related questions concerning translation, interpretation, and ethics. It first arose as a problem of translation about how to render an important passage from the *Xunzi* into English. As Nivison pointed out, it seemed that all the best English translations of this passage made Xunzi appear to be contradicting one of his core and most well-known claims: the teaching that "human nature is bad" (*xìng'è* 性惡). It is easy to see how this issue of translation directly and dramatically raises issues of interpretation, and here I mean how we are to understand not only this or that term or phrase but also Xunzi's larger ethical philosophy. If we accept the best English translations, then we have to accept that Xunzi contradicts himself on an issue critical to his ethical philosophy. This might move us to reconsider how to understand his philosophy overall. It could lead us to consider textual issues; for example, we might challenge whether this is an authentic example of Xunzi's writing or whether the text can or should be read as a consistent whole. In any event, the interpretative issue as well as these textual issues ↳ could have a significant effect on how we regard Xunzi as a philosopher. Finally, but no less importantly, how we translate and interpret key parts of this passage from the *Xunzi* can carry important implications for contemporary ethical philosophy and in particular for how we understand the nature and status of moral norms. This approach to reading classical Chinese philosophy, which sees a lively interaction between textual, interpretive, and philosophical issues, is characteristic of Nivison's work and something many of his students, those who studied directly under him as well as those who have been deeply influenced by him, greatly admire and endeavor to emulate.

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Nivison offered a solution to this problem in an important and highly insightful essay (1996) and discussed the initial problem in a brief exchange with James Behuniak (Nivison 2000; Behuniak 2000a, 2000b). In the course of the brief exchange, Nivison noted and endorsed a very different solution, which I had proposed to him on several occasions and here present in detail. Before turning to my proposed solution, I would first like to return to where this line of inquiry initially began, a passage from "The Rule of a King" (*Wangzhi* 王制) chapter of the *Xunzi*, and retrace the arguments that led to my current understanding of this important passage.[2] My hope is that this will convince at least some people not only about how to interpret this aspect of Xunzi's ethical philosophy, but also, more generally, how one should go about making a case for one's interpretation of early Chinese philosophy if one's aim is to represent the historical tradition while contributing to contemporary ethics.[3]

II. The Problem and Nivison's Initial Solution

Let's begin with the influential and elegant translation of Burton Watson, which served as the basis for Nivison's original article:

> Fire and water possess energy but are without life. Grass and trees have life but no intelligence. Birds and beasts have intelligence but no sense of duty. Man possesses energy, life, intelligence, and in addition, a sense of duty. Therefore he is the noblest being on earth. He is not as strong as the ox, nor as swift as the horse, and yet he makes the ox and horse work for him. Why? Because he is able to organize himself in society and they are not. Why is he able to organize himself in society? Because he

> sets up hierarchical divisions. And how is he able to set up hierarchical divisions? Because he has a sense of duty. If he employs this sense of duty to set up hierarchical divisions, then there will be harmony. Where there is harmony there will be unity; where there is unity there will be strength; and where there is strength there will be the power to conquer all things. Thus men can dwell in security in their houses and halls. The reason that men are able to harmonize their actions with the order of
p. 24 the seasons, utilize all things, and bring universal profit to the world is simply this: they have established hierarchical divisions and possess a ↳ sense of duty. Men, once born, must organize themselves into a society. But if they form a society without hierarchical divisions, then there will be quarreling. Where there is quarreling, there will be chaos; where there is chaos, there will be fragmentation; and where there is fragmentation, men will find themselves too weak to conquer other beings. Thus they will be unable to dwell in security in their houses and halls. This is why I say that *ritual principles* must not be neglected even for a moment.[4] (Watson 1963: 45–46)

There are a number of issues we might raise with this translation, but the one Nivison picked out as his "problem," and the one that animates our main concern, is Watson's decision to translate the Chinese character *yì* 義 as "a sense of duty." Watson adds a footnote that says, "Elsewhere I have translated this word as righteousness," and indeed this is a very common way to render this Chinese character, but the problem, as Nivison formulated it,

> lies in Xunzi's picking out "sense of duty" (*yi*) as the differentiating property of human beings. For, doesn't this say in effect that it is human nature to feel that one ought to do what is (or what one sees to be) one's duty? And if one says this, then the statement "human nature is evil" has to be subject to such a major qualification as to make it, *tout court*, quite misleading if we are considering the relation between "human nature" and morality.[5] (Nivison 2000: 126)

In other words, one can't, without contradiction, hold that one of the defining characteristics of human beings is that they possess a moral sense while at the same time insisting that they are bad by nature.[6]

Nivison considers two possible ways to save Xunzi from this apparent contradiction. The first, which he ultimately rejects, is that in this context Xunzi means by *yi* a superior kind of intelligence and specifically an ability to add and subtract various possible combinations and permutations of desire satisfaction in a way that leads one to see that morality is the best bet overall if one's goal is optimizing desire satisfaction. In other words, Xunzi is offering "a consequentialist argument for adopting a deontological moral position" (Nivison 2000: 210).

The problem with such a proposal is that in order for human beings not only to see that the Way (the moral life) is the best bet but also to commit themselves to it, we must understand the term *yi* as not only a superior ability for rational calculation but a capacity to regard something *as a duty*.[7] This leads us back to the problem we have identified: if human beings have such a capacity it seems to support something like Mengzi's view of morality over that of Xunzi's.

In order to address these shortcomings, and especially the threat of collapsing Xunzi's position into that of his rival Mengzi, Nivison offered a second solution: that Xunzi does believe human beings have "a sense of duty" but one that is "empty" of any particular content. In other words, in this context Xunzi means by *yi* the bare capacity to regard something *as a duty*. As we saw in the course of our discussion of the first proposal, this is
p. 25 what would be needed in order to move from a consideration of what is in one's best ↳ interests to the recognition of moral duty. The cunning aspect of this proposal, though, is the idea that this sense is "empty" of particular content, for such an empty capacity to see something as a duty, even in the most robust sense, does not entail that what one sees and accepts as one's duty is *moral*. One implication of this proposal is that a bare and empty "sense of duty" can lead us to take up a commitment to amoral or immoral causes. In light of this, Xunzi incurs no threat of contradiction in holding that we possess such a capacity but by nature tend toward

what is bad. All he is committed to is the notion that human beings "are capable of feeling and thinking morally," not that they are in any way naturally inclined to do so.

Nivison has identified a deep problem at the heart of Xunzi's ethical philosophy, and it is a problem that Western philosophers have engaged in and continue to grapple with as well. In this respect, Nivison's contribution is of tremendous importance, not only as a particular case but also as a model for how to study classical Chinese philosophy. When he first presented his account, I was deeply impressed by his analysis of the problem and initially convinced not only of its importance but also that it was correct. Over time, though, the same approach that led him to his conclusion led me to a very different solution. As I shall explain, my initial doubts arose because of aspects of the passage that generated the problem in the first place; these doubts came to be reinforced by other passages from the Xunzi and other, well-known features of his thought. In the end, I came to see a different picture, one I believe is truer to Xunzi's philosophy but no less interesting philosophically.

III. An Alternative Analysis and Solution

The first thing that motivated me to reconsider the proposed solution was that the passage seems to say quite clearly that whatever *yi* is, when used as the basis for "hierarchical divisions" (*fēn* 分), it enables human beings to order society, provide for their needs and desires, and harmonize those needs and desires with the greater natural world.[8] This led me to see two challenges to the "empty sense of duty" solution: first, an empty sense of duty would not guarantee the happy results described; we could choose to follow amoral or immoral principles or take improper causes as our duty. Second, *yi* is grouped together with *fen* and ritual (*lǐ* 禮) as the things that enable us to see, follow, and realize the moral life or Way; *fen* and *li*, though, are not used here or elsewhere in the text to identify *senses* but, rather, discrete *parts* of Confucian culture. Together, these two points prodded me to consider the possibility that *yi*, *fen*, and *li* were similar in nature in at least two respects: first, they are normative for human behavior, and second, they are products not of natural human inclinations, in other words, spontaneous features of human nature, but the result of human invention and experimentation, the result of what Xunzi calls "deliberate efforts" (*wěi* 偽).

p. 26 This line of thought was supported by some other well-known passages from the text. For example:

> What is that by which humans are human? I say: it is because they have distinctions. Desiring food when hungry, desiring warmth when cold, desiring rest when tired, liking the beneficial and hating the harmful—these are things people have from birth. These one does not have to await, but are already so. These are what Yu and Jie both share. However, that by which humans are human is not because they are special in having two legs and no feathers, but rather because they have distinctions. Now the ape's form is such that it also has two legs and no feathers. However, the gentleman sips ape soup and eats ape meat. Thus, that by which humans are human is not because they are special in having two legs and no feathers, but rather because they have distinctions. The birds and beasts have fathers and sons but not the intimate relationship of father and son. They have the male sex and the female sex but no differentiation between male and female. And so for human ways, none is without distinctions. Of distinctions, none are greater than social divisions, and of social divisions, none are greater than rituals, and of rituals, none are greater than those of the sage kings. (Hutton 2014: 35)

Here we find social divisions and rituals grouped together again and held up as the definitive normative standards for human behavior.[9] Moreover, this passage makes clear that Xunzi has in mind a quite specific set of social divisions and rituals: those *devised* by a series of gifted sage kings. Historically speaking, many different types of social divisions and rituals have been developed, implemented, and followed; some, though, are better than others. Here Xunzi makes clear that he is interested only in the ones that work and endure, not

the lesser and less successful attempts at constructing a humane social order. This passage explains that what makes human beings different from and superior to every other species, not only in power but also ethically, is that they have and hold on to the right cultural norms, beliefs, and practices. So, according to Xunzi, the culture of traditional Confucian society offers the only way for human beings to live a rich, harmonious, and humane life. Untutored human desires prevent us from pursuing such a life, and in this sense they are bad not only in terms of their consequences, that is, for the poor results they produce, but morally as well; they deny human beings the possibility of pursuing and enjoying a range of the most important goods characteristic of human life. The source of and standards for morality are not found in human nature; rather, they are found in the accumulated, best results of "deliberate efforts." This idea is seen in other important passages in the *Xunzi*; for example:

> Someone asks: if people's nature is bad, then from what are ritual and *yi* produced? I answer: In every case, ritual and *yi* are produced from the deliberate effort of the sage; they are not produced from people's nature. Thus, when the potter mixes up clay and makes vessels, the vessels are produced from the deliberate efforts of the craftsman; they are not produced from people's nature. Thus, when
p. 27 the craftsman carves wood and makes utensils, the utensils are produced from the deliberate efforts
↳ of the craftsman; they are not produced from people's nature. The sage accumulates reflections and thoughts and practices deliberate efforts and reasoned activities in order to produce ritual and *yi* and in order to establish proper models and measures. So, ritual and *yi* and proper models and measures are produced from the deliberate efforts of the sage; they are not produced from people's nature. (Hutton 2014: 250)

This passage makes abundantly clear that, for Xunzi, traditional Confucian norms, beliefs, and practices are precious *cultural artifacts*. A series of remarkably gifted sages brought these various cultural forms to a state of perfection through a long and arduous process of trial, error, and critical reflection, just as a potter learns to fashion bowls, develops and perfects the art of pottery, and passes on to posterity the greatest of his creations.[10] Xunzi does not and would never sharply distinguish the more clearly moral aspects of this ideal inherited culture from what we would consider its more aesthetic parts—for example, the kinds of decorations and insignia appropriate for adorning the chariot of a true king—both are parts of the sages' legacy, and both contribute to the good order and humanity of his ideal society.

We can further support this general line of interpretation with an argument Xunzi did not explicitly make but did strongly imply by focusing on the word *Dào* 道 or "Way." The precise derivation of this term is a matter of speculation, but everyone agrees that one of its earliest, core meanings is a path or road. This sense of Dao as a "way" or "path" comes into English perfectly, as do its related senses of "a *way* to get from here to there," "a *way* to do things" (the best or proper *way* to do things), "a *way* (or form) of life," and so on. One thing a Xunzian might and should say is that the Confucian Way offers us a path through life or a form of life, and like the paths and roads that offer us safe, efficient, and often pleasant passage through and greater access to the world, that connect us with one another, and that make a distinctively human life possible, these paths and roads are *human constructs*. They are the result of accumulated deliberate efforts; they are not natural features of the world or the direct expression of natural inclinations found in our nature; they are carved and shaped out of the natural terrain over time and with great effort and considerable cost. We and especially our ancestors have worked mightily to bring them and our way of life into existence, and we have to exert concerted effort in order to maintain them. These ideas are illustrated with clarity and force in a memorable passage from the *Xunzi*:

> Those who cross waters mark out the deep places, but if the markers are not clear, people will fall in. Those who order the people mark out the Way, but if the markers are not clear, there will be chaos. The rituals are those markers. To reject ritual is to bemuddle the world, and to bemuddle the world is to create great chaos.[11] (Hutton 2014: 181)

The paths or roads or, better yet, the complex system of paths and roads that constitute the Way are like human traditions, the result of accumulated insight and experimentation; this helps to explain Xunzi's much greater
p. 28 emphasis, in contrast to Mengzi, on the ↳ role of tradition, an issue we shall return to. Anything that blocks or harms the Way is not simply bad but, as noted earlier, bad in a special sense: it threatens the very possibility of a distinctively human way of life.

IV. Conclusion

In light of all that has been said up to this point, it should be clear that *yi* means something like "social norms," a translation that is close to but distinct from some standard translations for this term: "right" or "rightness."[12] Xunzi's point in all the passages examined earlier and many more we could cite from the text is that ethical behavior and a morally good society depend upon rituals (*li*), social divisions (*fen*), and social norms (*yi*) that evolved through an extended process of development, experiment, and critical reflection or accumulated "deliberate efforts."[13] They do not reflect and cannot in any direct way be traced to features or tendencies found within human nature. Indeed, if we are lucky enough to be born into a society in which such cultural forms are practiced and we apply ourselves to them conscientiously, they will *reshape* or *reform* our error-prone nature.[14] The result is an ethically informed and oriented second and decidedly social nature. Thus, Xunzi advocates a culturally based form of virtue ethics; unlike Mengzi, Xunzi does not think the virtues that lead to good lives and decent communities are developed expressions of good, Heavenly endowed tendencies within our nature. Quite to the contrary, the virtues are dispositions inculcated through reflective practices, forged over time in the course of cultural development, aimed at curbing and redirecting our worst tendencies while implanting new beliefs and desires that support an ethical, humane form of life.

Translating *yi* as "social norms" and understanding these as created, cultural artifacts offer us a new way to understand the passage with which we began. Let us return to it but this time through the translation of Eric L. Hutton:

> Water and fire have *qi* but are without life. Grasses and trees have life but are without awareness. Birds and beasts have awareness but are without *social norms*. Humans have *qi* and life and awareness, and moreover they have *social norms*. And so they are the most precious things under Heaven. They are not as strong as oxen or as fast as horses, but oxen and horses are used by them. How is this so? I say it is because humans are able to form communities while the animals cannot. Why are humans able to form communities? I say it is because of social divisions. How can social divisions be put into practice? I say it is because of *social norms*. And so if they use *social norms* in order to make social divisions, then they will be harmonized. If they are harmonized, then they will be unified. If they are unified, then they will have more force. If they have more force, then they will be strong. If they are strong, then they will be able to overcome the animals. And so they can get to live in homes and palaces. Thus, that people can order themselves with the four seasons, control the myriad things, and
> p. 29 bring benefit to all under Heaven is for no other reason than that ↳ they are able to get these social divisions and *social norms*. And so human life cannot be without community. If they form communities but are without social divisions, then they will struggle. If they struggle, then there will be chaos. If there is chaos then they will disband. If they disband then they will be weak. If they are weak then they cannot overcome the animals. And so they will not get to live in homes and palaces. This is the meaning of saying that "one must not let go of ritual and *social norms* for even a moment."[15] (Hutton 2014: 76)

This translation and interpretation avoids the problem that Nivison first identified, for it makes clear that the source of and standards for morality are not in any direct or substantial way found in human nature, which is bad in the senses I have described. The source of and standards for morality are to be found outside our

individual or collective nature, in the inherited cultural tradition that Kongzi preserved, defended, and advocated. As we have seen, such an interpretation coheres well with other important features of Xunzi's ethical philosophy; it also helps us to understand the much greater emphasis he placed, when compared with Mengzi, on ritual, the classics, and the role of teachers in the process of self-cultivation.

Reading Xunzi in this way can lead us to see that earlier efforts to understand and explain this remarkable passage went off course because they assumed it described a sort of *ladder of souls* (Needham 1985). Starting with insentient but energetic water and fire, moving through living but unaware grasses and trees, proceeding to sentient birds and beasts, and culminating in human beings, who are judged to be "the most precious things under Heaven," the passage seems at each stage to be identifying the most *essential characteristics* of each group or species and using these to explain where they lie along a hierarchically aligned great chain of being. However, as Xunzi makes clear, he believes the success and glory of human beings arise not out of their nature but from their having and cherishing the right kind of culture. In fact, he thinks the possession of such an artificially designed culture is what makes us human; this is especially clear in his answer to the question "What is that by which humans are human?" quoted earlier. What makes us the most powerful beings on earth and the most precious or noble is not some essential characteristic of our nature but our possession of Confucian rituals, social divisions, and social norms. We are able to organize ourselves into a humane, cooperative, and harmonious society, which allows us to overcome and make use of other animals who, by nature, are much more powerful and swift than we are, not because of our morally good nature but because we have the *right tools*.[16] When we stop looking at the passage as a *ladder of souls* and instead as an answer to the question of what enables human beings to do so well in the competitive struggle with other creatures, despite our quite pitiful natural abilities, the answer and point of the passage are easy to see: we have the right tools. In the case of morality and social organization, the really right tools are provided by the Confucian tradition.

Now some might be disappointed by this account of Xunzi's ethical philosophy for one of a variety of reasons. One reason might be that it clearly insists there is only one correct way to reform human beings into good and
p. 30 reliable moral agents and organize ↳ them into decent societies. Modern interpreters of Xunzi can devise responses to this kind of criticism in ways that allow for greater cultural diversity without opening the door to strong, much less complete moral relativism, but I will leave that exercise to others or at least for another day. I would like to conclude by pointing out how remarkably similar Xunzi's view is to that of a modern liberal thinker and suggest that Xunzi's explicit view about the respective roles of human nature and culture offers a better theoretical perspective on human morality and in particular on moral progress than this most impressive thinker provides.

It would be both unfair and foolish to attempt to summarize Steven Pinker's complex and stimulating book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (2011) in only a couple of lines, and I make no attempt to do so here. Instead, I seek only to highlight some implications of the core hypothesis of his work. As the title makes clear, Pinker sets out to show that violence, in just about every form, is much less prevalent in modern state-based societies than it has been throughout most of human history. He musters a remarkable array of statistical evidence to support this claim. His analysis of the causes for this happy development is clear, clean, and in its general structure compelling: since human nature itself has not changed in the course of recorded human history, what must have changed is how we have made use of what we, by nature, have. He describes human nature as a combination of "inner demons" and "better angels": the former inclining us to violence and the latter steering us to avoid such behavior. Here, already, we see him exploring issues that have been studied with great care and insight in the Confucian tradition; setting aside the Judeo-Christian expression of this duality, which strikes me as introducing distorting connotations about the *radical* normative valence of different human inclinations, we see here the same general concerns about human nature that distinguish the views of Xunzi and Mengzi.[17]

Moving on to the next step in his overall argument, Pinker makes clear that what has allowed us to become more consistently successful in suppressing our "inner demons" and following the "better angels" of our

nature is the development first of states and more recently of liberal forms of governance, education, trade, and the exchange of ideas, which encourage and support less violent and more harmonious forms of life. The presentation of his view makes abundantly clear that what he has in mind here, as the modern solution to the problem of violence, is the high liberal tradition of Western civilization. A multicultural, globally aware, highly educated, entrepreneurial trader, the ideal product of Western academic culture is the model and guide for this new world order and the source and cause for the decline of violence.

Now, all of this may well be true, in part or whole, but I want to make a couple of points about this next step in the argument. First, while Pinker tends to describe human nature as a mixture of good and bad (a theory that was explicitly defended in various forms in the course of Chinese philosophy), his data clearly support a less sanguine, more Xunzian account of human nature. At least in terms of their overall tendency, throughout almost all of recorded history, in a wide range of different circumstances and conditions, human beings consistently have shown a predilection for a mad variety of violent behavior.[18] Our nature not only inclines us
p. 31 toward bad behavior; it also ↳ presents a major obstacle preventing us from developing the abilities needed to enjoy a wide range of goods that are available only to those who have successfully curbed and reshaped their nature. Moreover, our nature is extremely recalcitrant to such reformation; as Bryan W. Van Norden has argued (2000: 127), invoking William James, successful cultivation requires us "to engage in the moral equivalent of war against our desires." In all of these respects, by nature, we tend to be pretty bad, which is one thing that Xunzi meant by his teaching that "human nature is bad" (which is *not* the claim that it is evil or demon-like).[19] Second, according to Pinker, the source and cause of the recent, much better behavior of human beings is not our nature per se but the emergence of the right kind of culture. Of course, this is precisely what Xunzi says. The only important difference between Xunzi and Pinker on this score is that the former believes traditional Confucian culture provides us with the one right response to the challenges of our nature, while Pinker strongly implies we should all embrace modern Western liberal culture. This raises many interesting comparative issues. For example, if we compare the behavior of the victims of recent large-scale natural disasters, modern Western liberal culture seems to do much worse than contemporary Japanese (largely Confucian) or Southeast Asian (largely Muslim) cultures. Consider how people behaved in the wake of Hurricane Katrina compared with what happened after the tsunami in Southeast Asia or the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. There was much more violence, looting, and general mayhem in the former case compared with the latter cases. Of course, many factors contributed to these differences, but the contrast is dramatic and might be quite revealing. From a Xunzian standpoint, examples like this offer prima facie evidence that certain cultures are more successful than others at redirecting and reshaping some of our bad natural tendencies, and that we can be reshaped in deep, remarkable, and lasting ways.[20]

Now perhaps Pinker is right, for the most part, about the empirical aspects of this problem; nevertheless, some of the empirical claims he makes to support his thesis are simply false. For example, he claims that "For most of human history … conquest was what governments did" and that the leaders of such states were considered "great" for their military and expansionist achievements and never for their cultural or scientific accomplishments (2011: 161–62). Countries like China or Korea, though, cannot be described as expansionist states. In the case of the former, aside from Qin Shi Huangdi, who is condemned as the prototypical *bad* ruler, and certain Mongol emperors, who represented a conquering and occupying culture, most Chinese emperors have been held up as paragons of *culture* and not military prowess. One of the most remarkable examples is Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty. The same is true for Korea, which offers examples such as King Sejong, fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty, who was one of only two Korean kings known as "The Great" (*Daewang* 대왕) and who won this appellation for his remarkable cultural and political achievements. Here, as in a number of places, Pinker presents as universal truths about human societies a kind of ethnography of European cultures. This highlights another respect in which comparative philosophy would enhance and can even be seen as necessary for such research. Xunzi's ethical philosophy offers us the more accurate *theoretical* account
p. 32 of the underlying ↳ assumption and mechanism that motivate Pinker's project: human nature is bad and can only be made good through the right kind of culture; the right kind of culture opens up civilized life as a

possibility and is partly constitutive of such a life.[21] If this is correct, and in some sense I believe it is, then we should hold a view somewhere in between that of Kant and Burke in regard to the power of our individual reason and the value of tradition.[22] On the one hand, Kant tends to undervalue the insights and other goods that traditions can afford and is too optimistic about what individual agents can achieve on their own, through the power of their rationality. On the other hand, Burke is too uncritical and accepting of tradition and too pessimistic about how much understanding individuals can and must attain if things are to go well. While a great defender of tradition, unlike Burke, Xunzi thinks that with enough concerted study and reflection, the most gifted can understand many of the reasons why moral norms and practices are as they are, and even the average person can discern important parts of morality's foundation, which seems to bring him at least a bit closer to Hume's view about how people come to accept the dictates of morality. Xunzi further thinks that enlightened rulers can use such understanding to at least tinker with the traditions they inherit. This not only places Xunzi in between Kant and Burke when it comes to the power of our individual reason and the value of tradition; it also suggests ways one might extend Xunzi's views and develop them into an even more plausible alternative to these two powerful trends that still run through contemporary Western ethics and political philosophy.[23]

Notes

1. With a sense of immense gratitude, I dedicate this chapter to my mentor David S. Nivison. Thanks to Erin M. Cline, Eirik L. Harris, Eric L. Hutton, Eric Schwitzgebel, Michael R. Slater, and Justin Tiwald for comments and suggestions on earlier drafts. Thanks to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the CHIANG Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange for generously supporting the workshop "Comparing Two Masters: Xunzi and Hume" held at the Philosophy Department of the University of Utah July 6–9, 2012, where I presented an earlier version of this work. Special thanks to the participants of that workshop, Eric L. Hutton, Sungmoon KIM, Al Martinich, Elizabeth Radcliff, Lisa Shapiro, Michael Slote, and Ling-kang WANG for their extremely helpful criticisms and suggestions.

2. Unless otherwise noted, I rely on the splendid translation by Hutton (2014).

3. I have offered a more complete argument and examples of various ways to do this in Ivanhoe (2012).

4. The term "ritual principles," which I italicize here, would better be translated "ritual and *yi*."

5. Nivison translates *xing'e* 性惡 as "human nature is evil," whereas I regard "human nature is bad" as less misleading.

6. One might argue that human beings possess a weak moral sense, which within the greater context of their nature still leaves the latter as overall bad. This is not what Xunzi says, and such a view would still face many of the problems that
p. 33
Nivison identifies (for Xunzi seems to say that the "moral sense" is sufficient to lead us to the good). Moreover, such ↳ a suggestion leaves Xunzi's position almost indistinguishable from that of Mengzi, but Xunzi repeatedly and emphatically rejects Mengzi's view of human nature.

7. Several contemporary philosophers have offered extremely trenchant and revealing analyses of this problem in regard to Mengzi and Xunzi's philosophy, beginning with Bryan W. Van Norden's brilliant and trailblazing essay (2000).

8. Hutton translates *fen* as "social divisions," which I think is more accurate. This is the translation I will use from this point onward, but readers should note that Watson renders this word differently.

9. In this passage, Xunzi adds "distinctions" (*bian* 辨) as well. We should keep in mind that here and elsewhere Xunzi is interested in *proper* distinctions, social divisions, and rituals. He recognizes that there are many different sets of these both available and possible, but he wants us to focus on and embrace the *right* set: those that constitute traditional Confucian culture. Harris (2016) discusses this and related issues in a most revealing way.

10. Nivison was the first to suggest the idea that a process of trial and error serves as the basis for the normative authority of Confucian rites and norms (Ivanhoe 1996: 328–29). He further develops the idea and notes that it was expressed in more developed and sophisticated forms by later Confucians such as Dai Zhen (1724–1777) and Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801) (Nivison 1996: 52–54).

11. Thanks to Eric L. Hutton for pointing out the importance of this passage for the point here in play.

12. The most careful textual and philosophical analysis of the meaning of the term *yi* can be found in Hutton (1996); see also Harris (2016).

13. This makes Xunzi's view similar in important ways to what we find in contemporary thinkers such as Blackburn (1984) and Mackie (1990).

14. This is why Xunzi is helpfully understood as presenting a "reformation model" of moral self-cultivation in contrast to thinkers like Mengzi who advocate a "development model." For these ideas, see Ivanhoe (2000).

15. Hutton leaves *yi* as romanization, but I have taken the liberty of substituting "social norms" for each occurrence in this passage. These all are italicized for easy identification.

16. For other work that develops a similar line of interpretation of this aspect of Xunzi's philosophy, see Eric L. Hutton (1996, 2000); Harris (2016).

17. Somewhat surprisingly, given the explicitly cross-cultural perspective Pinker assumes, relies upon, and applauds, there is no mention of either of these early Chinese philosophers in his work.

18. Pinker provides good evidence and argument to support the claims that the vast majority of such violent behavior is perpetrated by men as opposed to women and that women have a significant pacifying effect on communities of males.

19. While Pinker's primary theory is that human nature is a mixture of good and bad, at times he describes it more as Xunzi did. For example, he notes that the issue of the historical trend of violence "bears on our conception of human nature…. The belief that it has decreased suggests that we started off nasty and that the artifices of civilization have moved us in a noble direction …" (2011: xxi–xxii). Such a view seems to imply a Xunzian-style claim about the possibility of transformation through self-cultivation, something Pinker nowhere discusses explicitly.

20. Thanks to Erin M. Cline for bringing up this kind of comparison and discussing its implications.

p. 34 21. Contrary to what both Xunzi and Pinker seem to say, there could be more than one way to thread the needle; neither has provided us with any reason to believe that there cannot be numerous, distinct, yet equally satisfying ways to organize humans into stable and humane societies.

22. In general, Pinker tends to express a view quite closely aligned with Kant, though one that is more aware of the socially constructed nature of the Kantian form of life. For Pinker's views on Burke, see Pinker (2000: 184–85). Thanks to Eric Schwitzgebel for helpful exchanges on this point and other aspects of Pinker's work.

23. For an example of how one might extend and develop Xunzi's view, while Xunzi thought that no more than tinkering with tradition would ever be needed, his theory is evidence based. So, if it can be demonstrated that aspects of the received tradition are not or no longer fulfilling their purpose, then no matter how radical the necessary solution might be, Xunzi would be committed to adopting and enacting it. Thanks to Eirik L. Harris for raising this point.

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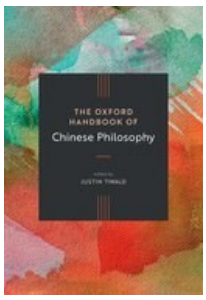

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CHAPTER

3 *Qing*情 as the Foundation of Xunzi's Naturalist Ethics

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Abstract

This chapter investigates the various meanings of *qing* 情 and their connections with ritual propriety and social order in the *Xunzi*. One cluster of such meanings includes actualities, actual qualities, and actual circumstances. The other cluster encompasses affective states of feelings, emotions, and sentiments. *Qing* as human feelings can be further analyzed in the negative, positive, or neutral sense. Xunzi holds that "rules of ritual propriety are established in correspondence with *qing*." This proposition does not suggest that inborn human feelings are the sole criterion for the establishment of ritual practices. Instead, it suggests that the establishment of ritual practices should take into consideration the attributes of human feelings and also pay close attention to the actual conditions of the larger environment to ensure that feelings are addressed and transformed in positive ways. On this understanding, there is no contradiction between Xunzi's view that humans' *xìng* 性 or natural tendencies are bad and his proposition that "rules of ritual propriety are established in correspondence with *qing*." Logically, for Xunzi, ritual propriety has to be established on the human feelings in the neutral sense, in the context of constructing orderly human society and of achieving harmony with the natural environment.

Keywords: Xunzi, qing, actualities, feelings, ritual propriety, harmony
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
Series: Oxford Handbooks
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I. Introduction

Xunzi (荀子) is a naturalist ethicist. For him, morality comes from neither the divine nor pure reason. Central to his moral philosophy is the concept of ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮).[1] Rules of ritual propriety are established in order to regulate human activities so that society can accommodate appropriate human feelings and desires with limited resources. But what kind of feelings and desires are appropriate? For Xunzi, these are determined both on natural grounds and on social grounds. They are determined on natural grounds as human biological and psychological needs have a natural basis. Natural grounds alone, however, are not adequate, as our inborn natural tendencies are toward selfish satisfaction and leads to competition and chaos. There must also be social grounds for determining the appropriate types and amounts of feelings and desires. The social grounds are predicated on limited resources and on the need to satisfy other people's feelings and desires. These social considerations require people to adjust their feelings and desires according to their respective social stations and to feasible levels of goods that can become available so they can be satisfied without causing chaos. When people are accustomed to rules of ritual propriety, they can internalize it and become morally cultivated persons. A society that is regulated effectively by ritual propriety and filled with moral cultivated people is a good society.

Closely associated with Xunzi's understanding of human desires are three concepts, *xìng* 性, *qíng* 情, and *yù* 欲. Xunzi defines *xing* as "what is naturally born so" in us (*Xunzi*, Chapter 22, *Zhengming*; see Knoblock 1994: 127, 136). Although *xing* has often been translated as "(human) nature" (e.g., Chan 1963: 128), "nature" may be too rigid for the meaning of *xing*, as Xunzi maintains that,
p. 37 even though *xing* is bad at birth, it ↳ can be transformed through a process of moral cultivation; thus, "natural tendencies" may be more appropriate in rendering *xing.* Xunzi describes *qing* as the "material" or the "body" (*zhì* 質) of *xing* (Chapter 22; see Knoblock 1994: 136). Specifically, Xunzi says that "*xing*'s liking, disliking, delight, anger, sorrow, and joy are called *qing*" (Knoblock 1994: 127). Finally, Xunzi characterizes *yu* as responses (*yìng* 應) to *qing* (Knoblock 1994: 136). Often translated as "desire," *yu* stands for what a person wants. In Xunzi's view, humans are born with *qing*; in response to *qing*, we come to *yu* or desire things.[2] If the heart-mind (*xīn* 心) decides to satisfy certain desires, it motivates the person to pursue. With rules of ritual propriety, humans can control and transform their natural tendencies, cultivate *qing*, and regulate *yu*, resulting in an orderly society.

A much-discussed issue is how Xunzi accounts for the first appearance of moral goodness, given that he thinks our natural tendencies are bad. There are numerous proposals. Fung Yu-lan maintains that while Xunzi holds that humans' inborn tendencies are bad, they are equipped with a natural ability to acquire knowledge, an ability to use their intelligence (*zhì* 知). Intelligence enables human beings to realize that they cannot live well without social organization, and that there cannot be functional social organization without morality. Realizing this necessity, the earliest leaders in Chinese civilization devised a moral system (Fung 1961: 365). A. C. Graham has a different take on the origin of moral goodness for Xunzi. He holds that according to Xunzi, humans possess both good and bad desires, and their natural tendencies are bad because the good desires and bad desires are mixed in an "anarchic" way (Graham 1989: 248). On Graham's account, Xunzi holds that in *xing* there are both desires for "the right" (*yì* 義) and desires for profit (*lì* 利), which conflict with each other. The intelligent person can learn to bring himself to desire order. Such a person "can by unremitting accumulation of stern thought and effort bring his conflicting desires to orderliness" (Graham 1989: 248). Accordingly, good desires give rise to and promote goodness. Some authors such as Zhicheng Zhou and Kim-Chong Chong deny that Xunzi thinks *xing* is bad. Zhou explicitly argues that Xunzi holds that *xing* is "*pǔ* 樸," namely, plain, natural, and unadorned. He maintains that because it is only natural rather than bad, nothing prevents it from becoming good (Zhou 2007). Chong argues that for Xunzi, humans possess wants and capacities that go beyond the basic sensory and appetitive desires and feelings. "These wants at the same time imply the need for security, and the capacities for prudence, refinement and hence for establishing ritual principles" (Chong 2008: 71). I have argued that, though Xunzi holds that humans are born with bad *xing*, that is, human desires without regulation tend to lead to bad consequences, he takes early social leaders' aversion to chaos to be the direct motivation for them to establish order in human society (Li 2011).

Although much ink has been spilled over Xunzi's concept of *xing*, it is *qing* more than anything else that serves as the key to his naturalist ethics. Xunzi's ethics is founded on transforming *xing* and regulating *yu* effectively with ritual propriety. *Xing* is constituted by *qing* as its material; *yu* is aroused by *qing.* Xunzi claims that in a civilized society, "rules of ritual propriety are established in correspondence with *qing*" (Chapter 19, *Lilun*; see Knoblock 1994: 69). Therefore, *qing* is the foundational element in
p. 38 Xunzi's moral philosophy. As the middle term between *xing* and *yu*, *qing* is crucial to ↳ our understanding of both these concepts, and his moral theory. Unfortunately, Xunzi's account of *qing* is scattered across various chapters in the *Xunzi*, and, at times, Xunzi

appears to say inconsistent things about it. In order to accurately understand his notion of *qing*, we need to delineate various shades of its meanings. This chapter embarks on a careful study of Xunzi's notion of *qing.* Through a nuanced analysis of textual evidence, I show how Xunzi's naturalist ethics is founded on his understanding of human feelings.

II. Two Clusters of Meanings of *Qing*

Although scholars of Xunzi usually read *qing* as feelings, emotions, or passions, the term possesses another cluster of meanings that gravitates toward actuality (*shiqing* 實情), as it is often found in pre-Qin era texts (see Graham 1986: 59–66). The *Xunzi* employs numerous uses of *qing* in the sense of actuality. For instance, Xunzi writes,

> If you cast aside the concerns proper to humanity in order to speculate about what belongs to Heaven, you will miss the actualities (*qing*) of the myriad things. (*Xunzi: Tianlun*, Knoblock 1994: 21, modified)

Xunzi holds that Heaven or nature (*tīan* 天) maintains its own course. Humans can benefit by understanding how it works and by using it for their own purposes. Knowing how things work is important in making use of them. In Chapter 21, *Jiebi*, Xunzi discusses how each of the myriad things possesses a perceptible form, and each being perceived can be assigned its proper place in the world. He maintains that a person can sit in his own house yet perceive all within the four seas. He can live in the present yet find the proper place for what is remote in space and distant in time. Xunzi writes,

> By penetrating into and inspecting the myriad things, he knows their actual qualities (*qing*). By examining and testing order and disorder, he is fully conversant with their inner laws. By laying out the warp and woof of Heaven and Earth, he tailors the functions of the myriad things. By regulating and distinguishing according to the great ordering, he encompasses everything in space and time. (Knoblock 1994: 105, modified)

Furthermore, in Chapter 3, *Bugou*, Xunzi writes,

> Hence by holding on to what is very small, he can undertake tasks that are extremely large, just as with a short ruler only five inches long one can measure the area of the whole world. Thus, the gentleman need not leave his own house, yet the actualities (*qing*) of all that is within the seas are established and accumulated there. (Knoblock 1988: 179, modified)

p. 39 In these passages, *qing* means "actualities," "actual qualities," or "actual circumstances." This is the primary meaning of the term in first cluster. Closely related to this use is the meaning of the essential or quintessential of something. In Chapter 16, *Qiangguo*, Xunzi writes,

> Having moral principles and a sense of what is just moderates the person within and the myriad things without. Above they produce peace for the ruler and below they create a fine-tuned balance for the people. Within and without, above and below, moderation is the essential quality (*qing*) of moral principles and of justice. (Knoblock 1990: 248, modified)

For Xunzi, the *qing* of moral principles and justice refer to their substantive contents. Saying that "moderation is the *qing* of moral principles and of justice" suggests that moderation is implied in the very notion of moral principles and justice and is essential to them. A similar usage of *qing* can also be found in Chapter 20, *Yuelun*. It is stated there, "It is the essential characteristics (*qing*) of music to seek to exhaust the root of things and to carry change to its highest degree" (Knoblock 1994: 84, modified). In this usage, *qing* suggests something deep in the subject and something that represents its quintessential characteristics. This sense is somewhat implied in the concept of actuality; namely, it is actually such and such no matter what its appearance is.

Further from the sense of the essential quality, *qing* can also be extended to mean authenticity. In Chapter 30, *Faxing*, Xunzi draws an analogy between the morally refined person and jade. In Xunzi's view, jade is refined, pleasant, and beneficial. A piece of jade's virtue stems from the regularity and orderliness in the arrangement of its veins, just like a person's virtue stems from his regular and orderly character. Jade is hard and strong and will not bend, like the moral person's rectitude. Jade will break but will not give way, like true courage. Then Xunzi states,

> Its *xia shi* 瑕適 are both visible, like being authentic (*qing* 情). Strike it and its sounds will ring forth clearly and be heard in the distance, and when they cease, there is a sense of sadness, like modulated speech. Thus although the serpentine is carved, the result does not equal the natural markings of jade. The *Odes* says: I am thinking of my gentleman, how refined he looks, like jade. This expresses my meaning. (Knoblock 1994: 257, modified)

The term *xiá shì* 瑕適 has often been interpreted to mean *xiá zhé* 瑕謫, which describes flaws in a piece of jade (see Wang 1988: 535–36). When both flaws and virtues are in plain sight, no attempts are made to conceal flaws, which implies authenticity. When describing a person, "*qing*" in this sense suggests authenticity or honesty. This sense can also be seen as an extension of the sense of actuality. In Chapter 3, *Bugou,* Xunzi says, "[One] who neither shows off his good qualities nor glosses over his faults but uses the true circumstances (*qing* 情) to recommend himself, is properly termed an 'honest scholar' " (Knoblock 1988: 179–80). Though
p. 40 "*qing*" here is used in the sense of actuality, ↳ the expression "uses the true circumstances to recommend himself," *yǐ qíng zì jié* 以情自竭 literally means "exhausting one's *qing* fully," pointing to the sense of authenticity or honesty. A good person does not hide his shortcomings; he presents himself fully as he actually is. In comparison, the statement "its *xia shi* are both visible, (it is) like being authentic (*qing*)" (Chapter 30) is but a different way of describing "one who neither shows off his good qualities nor glosses over his faults but uses the true circumstances (*qing* 情) to recommend himself" (Chapter 3). The use of *qing* in the sense of authenticity is a shorthand of the expression of "exhausting one's *qing* fully." Given their linkage, we may say that actuality, the essential, and authenticity comprise one cluster of *qing*'s meanings.

The second cluster of meanings of *qing* points to an affective state of consciousness. In this sense, *qing* stands for a cluster of psychophysiological states of feeling, emotion, and passion. Even though this cluster of meanings has been the common understanding of the term in reading the *Xunzi*, A. C. Graham has resisted such a reading. He ventured that *qing* in the *Xunzi* and all pre-Han literature means "facts" and "genuine" and that it never means "passions" (or its likes) (Graham 1986: 59).[3] Somewhat like Gottlob Frege, Graham distinguishes reference from meaning. We may use "high" to refer to a mountain and "low" to refer to a valley. But "high" does not mean "mountain," nor does "low" mean "valley." Graham does not deny that *qing* can refer to feelings or passions in the *Xunzi.* He insists, however, that it never means feelings or passions (Graham 1986: 64). According to Graham, when Xunzi uses "*qing*" to refer to feelings, Xunzi means that these feelings are genuine; Xunzi's statement that "*xing*'s liking, disliking, delight, anger, sorrow, and joy are called *qing*" means that these are called "the genuine in us" (Graham 1986: 65). Graham errs in his account, however, because *qing* can mean feelings, emotions, or passions in pre-Han literature, and it does mean these things in multiple places in the *Xunzi*. It is simply not true that *qing* never means passions or its likes in pre-Han literature. For instance, the "*Xìng Zì Mìng Chū*" text of the Guodian Bamboo Strips contains the statement "*zhì lè bì bēi, kū yì bēi, jiē zhì qí qíng yě* 至樂必悲, 哭亦悲, 皆至其情也" (Liu 2003: 98). It says that "when happiness goes to extreme, it turns into sadness, and crying is also sadness; both are utmost states of *qing*." This statement corresponds to another statement "*yòng qíng zhī zhì zhě*, *āi lè wéi shèn* 用情之至者, 哀樂為甚" in the same text (Liu 2003: 101), which says that the utmost forms of *qing* are exemplified in sorrow and happiness. In these statements, *qing* cannot mean "actuality" or "the genuine" as Graham claims.[4] We can surely say that a person's sadness or happiness is genuine. But "genuine" here describes *how* it is rather than *what* it is. Sadness and happiness are human emotions. If they are forms of *qing*, it must mean some sort of affective state of consciousness. Connecting the dots between these usages of *qing* and Xunzi's statement that "*xing*'s liking, disliking, delight, anger, sorrow, and joy are called *qing*," it only makes sense if we read *qing* similarly as affective states of consciousness.

Furthermore, in Chapter 2, Xi*ushen*, Xunzi says,

> If your deportment is respectful and reverent, if your heart is loyal and faithful, if you use only those methods sanctioned by ritual propriety and morality, and if your *qing* is one of love and humanity, then though you travel throughout the
p. 41 empire, and ↳ though you find yourself living in uncivilized remote tribes in the four directions, everyone would consider you to be an honorable person. (Knoblock 1988: 154, modified)

The four "if" phrases in Chinese are parallel in structure, where "heart" (*xīn* 心) corresponds with "*qing*": whereas one's heart is loyal and faithful, one's *qing* is loving and humane. *Qing* here unambiguously points to feelings rather than "actuality" or "the genuine" as Graham has claimed.

English terms for the kind of affective states discussed here include “feeling,” “emotion,” and “passion.” Feeling ranges from physical sensations (e.g., “hot”) to mental sentiments (e.g., his feeling for her). Emotion refers to mental sentiments, often implying the presence of excitement or agitation. Passion usually stands for intense and compelling emotions.[5] Perhaps we can say that liking and disliking are just feelings, whereas delight, anger, sorrow, and joy can be called emotions. For the sake of simplicity, I will use “feeling” for *qing* in this sense as it is, when used generally, it covers “emotion” and “passion.” In the *Xunzi*, we can find abundant uses of *qing* in these senses of feeling, as we will show next.

Qing as human feelings is related directly to Xunzi’s ethical theory. In relation to morality, *qing* is often viewed as contrary to ritual propriety. According to Xunzi, prior to the transformation of their inborn natural tendencies and the development of their acquired moral abilities, humans’ *qing* are innately fond of grand sounds, intense colors, and rich aromas. *Qing* in this sense is normally paired with *xing* 性 as *qing-xing* 情性, especially when Xunzi is expounding his views on humans’ natural tendencies as bad.

In Chapter 23, *Xing-e*, Xunzi confirms that “it is the inborn natural tendencies in humanity that when hungry he desires something to eat, that when cold he wants warm clothing, and that when weary he desires rest—such are his inborn feelings (*qing*) and natural tendencies.” Therefore,

> His inborn feelings (*qing*) and natural tendencies are not to show courtesy or defer to others. To show courtesy and to defer to others contradicts his inborn feelings (*qing*) and his natural tendencies. (Knoblock 1994: 153, modified)

Xunzi maintains that a love of profit and the desire to obtain it belong to humans’ inborn feelings (*qing*). These feelings lead people to fight for desired things if they are not regulated with social norms. “Thus, following one’s inborn feelings and natural tendencies will lead to strife even among brothers, and when it has been transformed by ritual propriety and morality, brothers will yield their claim to others of their own country” (Knoblock 1994: 154, modified). From this perspective, *qing* (inborn feelings) and *xing* (human natural tendencies) are closely linked together. As Xunzi said, “When each person follows his natural tendencies and indulges his inborn feelings, aggressiveness and greed are certain to develop. This is accompanied by violation of social class distinctions and throws the rational social order into anarchy, resulting in a cruel tyranny” (Knoblock 1994: 151, modified).

p. 42 Based on his analysis of *qing-xing* 情性, Xunzi fictionalized the following conversation between sage-kings Yao and Shun, in Chapter 23, *Xing’e*:

> Yao asked Shun: “What are the natural feelings (*qing*) of the humankind like?” Shun replied: “their natural feelings are very unlovely things. But why need you ask about them? When a man has a wife and children, the filial obligations that he observes toward his parents decrease. When he has satisfied his desires and obtained the things he enjoys, his good faith toward his friends withers away. When he has fully satisfied his desire for high office and good salary, his loyalty to his lord diminishes. Oh humans’ natural feelings! Humans’ natural feelings-how very unlovely they are! Why need you ask about them!” (Knoblock 1994: 160, modified)

According to Xunzi, the inborn human *qing* was in an unlovely state, and any attempt to go with the flow of *qing* would lead to nothing but chaos. Since this is the indisputable truth, why should we even ask about them?

It is noteworthy that the negative connotation of *qing* is commonly accepted in reading the *Xunzi*. However, it does not exhaust the whole meaning of *qing* as feelings. For instance, Xunzi points out in Chapter 19, *Lilun*,

> To try to surpass each other in appearing distraught and emaciated is the way of bad men. It is not the cultivated form of ritual propriety and morality, nor is it the feeling (*qing*) of a filial son. (Knoblock 1994: 65–66, modified)

Here, “the feeling of a filial son” refers to the kind of feeling proper to a filial son; it is therefore a good feeling. Even such good feelings, however, have to be well measured. In Chapter *Lilun*, for instance, Xunzi suggests that a funeral for a deceased parent should not extend indefinitely even though a mourning son feels that way. For Xunzi, human feelings framed in the positive sense are not inherent in humanity, as he posits, “[appropriate] feelings are what I do not possess [at birth], but I can nonetheless create” (Knoblock 1990: 81, modified). According to Tang scholar YANG Liang’s commentary, what Xunzi says here is that positive human

feelings are not inborn to humans, but inborn feelings can nonetheless be directed to the right path with the help of external influences (Wang 1988: 144). Another example can be found in Chapter 21, *Jiebi*:

> The sage follows (*zòng* 縱) his desires (*yu*) and fulfills (*jiān* 兼) his feelings (*qing*), but having regulated them, he accords with rational principles of order. Truly what need has he for strength of will, for endurance, or for circumspection? (Knoblock 1994: 108, modified)

The Qing commentator WANG Xianqian understood the word *zong* 縱 here as *cóng* 從, which means "to follow." YANG Liang defined *jian* 兼 as *jin* 盡, which means "to fulfill" (Wang 1988: 404). In all, Xunzi posits that the sage can follow his desires and fulfill his feelings. Obviously, these desires and feelings are not bad. Like Confucius at the age of 70 when he allegedly was able to
p. 43 follow his desires without transgression, the sage ↳ can completely fulfill his feelings without transgression, because feelings in this context are good.

Besides the negative and positive senses of *qing*, Xunzi also uses it in a neutral sense, in a sense that is neither good nor bad. For example, in Chapter 20, *Yuelun*, Xunzi says,

> Music is joy. Being an essential part of people's feelings, the expression of joy is, by necessity, inescapable. (Knoblock 1994: 80, modified)

In Chapter 3, *Bugou*, Xunzi writes,

> One who has just washed his body will shake out his robes and one who has just washed his hair will dust off his cap. This is due to people's natural feelings. (Knoblock 1988: 177, modified)

The first quote suggests that people cannot do without joy because the expression of joy is, by necessity, inescapable. On the one hand, the human feelings expressed here cannot be understood in the negative sense; otherwise, there is no way we can account for the necessity and the value of joy. On the other hand, there is no indication from Xunzi that they have to be understood in the positive sense either. Consistent with Xunzi's position, good things have to undergo a process of cultivation and transformation, just like "the feelings proper to the filial son," but the human feelings discussed in the two cited passages are deemed to be inherent in humanity. In the second quote, it is said that a person will instinctively shake out his clothes and dust off his cap after washing his body and hair. The human feelings or sentiments displayed are clearly natural emotional responses of the average person in everyday life and should be understood in a neutral sense.

In summary, *qing* has many different connotations in Xunzi. One cluster of meanings includes actuality, essential qualities, and authenticity; the other cluster of meanings covers human feelings. When *qing* is understood as human feelings, it can be further classified into the negative, positive, or neutral sense. From the point of view that following inborn human feelings without restraint will lead to strife, chaos, and impoverishment, human feelings are problematic or bad. But humans' natural tendencies can be transformed, and acquired abilities in exercising feelings appropriately can be developed; thus, human feelings can become good. The positive and negative states of feelings are varied manifestations of raw human psychophysiological states. As far as human feelings exist ontologically prior to following their natural tendencies to become bad or to be made good through ritual propriety, they can be said to be neutral.

III. *Qing* and Morality

Having examined various meanings of *qing* in the *Xunzi*, we can now investigate Xunzi's view of the connections between *qing* and
p. 44 morality, or more specifically how human ↳ feelings understood in the various senses conceptually relate to morality. Morality, for Xunzi, is realized in the establishment and practice of ritual propriety. Therefore, *qing*'s relationship to morality is found in its relationship to ritual propriety. In Xunzi's view, there is a mutual effect between *qing* and ritual propriety. On the one hand, *qing* serves as a basis for ritual propriety in society. On the other hand, ritual propriety also shapes and channels *qing* in appropriate ways.

One of Xunzi's key statements on this relationship is formulated in his discussion of funeral ritual in Chapter 19, *Lilun*, where he claims that "rules of ritual propriety are established in correspondence with *qing*" (*chèng qíng ér lì wén* 稱情而立文, *Lilun*; Wang 1988: 372). The direct meaning of *cheng* is to measure or to be measured; here it implies being in proportion to. So, the statement can be understood as saying that rules of ritual propriety are established in ways compatible with *qing.* It suggests that rules of ritual propriety must be appropriate to *qing*.[6]

When asked why mourning for deceased parents was extended into the third year, Xunzi said,

> Rules of ritual propriety are established in correspondence with *qing*. Use of these forms ornaments social relations. They distinguish between the obligations of proximal and distal relations as well as nobility and laity. They admit neither of diminution nor of addition. Thus it is said that they are methods that are matchless and unchanging. The greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals. The practice of mourning into the third year deals with occasions when the extreme pain of grief has reached its pinnacle, so rules of ritual propriety were established in correspondence with *qing*. (Chapter 19, *Lilun*; Knoblock 1994: 69, modified)

According to the text, it is because the greater the wound, the longer it remains, and the more pain it generates, the more slowly it heals; three years have to be put aside for funeral rites to assuage the intense anguish felt by those who have lost beloved parents. The funeral rites are established in accordance with people's feelings in mourning.

An important question arises: if we understand *qing* as human feelings in this context, can this particular proposition make sense in Xunzi's philosophy? As discussed before, *qing* as human feelings can be understood in the negative, positive, or neutral sense. Human feelings in the negative sense refer to the inborn, unembellished, original feelings. Such inborn feelings carry the natural tendencies to cause strife, chaos, and impoverishment and thus cannot be used as the basis for ritual propriety. Presumably, ritual practices that passively correspond to the negative state of human feelings will lead only to strife, chaos, and impoverishment. This is clearly in direct conflict with Xunzi's ideal of ritual propriety.

Contrary to human feelings in the negative sense, human feelings understood in the positive sense are feelings that are consistent with ritual propriety. For example, "the feelings of a filial son" are feelings of reverence, gratitude and reciprocity that a good son holds toward his parents. Establishing ritual rules and practices based on such positive feelings will no doubt have good effects.
p. 45 However, in Xunzi, even *qing* in the good ↳ sense need to be nurtured and measured so that they are expressed in appropriate ways. A filial son possesses good feelings toward his parents. But he may not know how to express these feelings appropriately at his parents' funeral without following rules of ritual propriety, nor should he mourn them indefinitely. Ritual propriety makes a well-organized funeral possible. According to Xunzi, well-measured positive feelings are not feelings inherent to humans; instead, they are the product of transformed human natural tendencies and are acquired abilities. In other words, human feelings in the positive sense can only come after the establishment of ritual practices, not as the basis for it. They can serve as the basis for improving forms of ritual propriety, but not as the foundation for the initial establishment of it. If the purpose for corresponding with human feelings is to "establish rules of ritual propriety," then understanding human feelings here in the positive sense will only lead to circular reasoning, because these feelings themselves are the product of transformed humans' natural tendencies and acquired abilities and are therefore in accord with ritual propriety. Now we are left with only the option of "corresponding with human feelings" in the neutral sense. Human feelings, as suggested here, should not be understood in either the positive or negative sense but should be taken in the neutral sense.

With the neutral sense, "correspondence with human feelings" aims to allow people to express their normal feelings. Xunzi holds that the anguish of losing one's loved ones is an example of a person's normal feelings. He writes in Chapter 19, *Lilun*,

> As a general principle, all creatures that live between Heaven and Earth and have blood and breath are certain to possess awareness, each of them loves its own kind. Consider the case of large birds and animals: if one loses its mate or is separated from its group, then even after a month or season has passed, it is sure to circle when it passes its old home. It looks about, round and round, crying and calling, sometimes moving, sometimes stopping, gazing about uncertainly and hesitantly, before it can leave the place. Even small birds like swallows and sparrows chatter and cry for a few moments

> before they can leave. Hence, since no creature with blood and breath has more awareness than humans, the feeling of a man for his parents is not exhausted even till death. (Knoblock 1994: 69, modified)

Ritual practices (e.g., funeral rites) were established to allow people to express their feelings as these. However, people's emotional states are not uniform. They vary for different types of people. Xunzi writes in Chapter 19, *Lilun*,

> Will we follow after those foolish and depraved men who by evening have forgotten a parent who died that morning? And if we indulge in such behavior are we not lower even than these birds and beasts? How can we even dwell together in the same community with such men and not have disorder! Or will we follow after those "cultivated and ornamented" gentlemen? For them the twenty-five months of the three-year mourning period pass as quickly as a running horse glimpsed through the crack in a wall, and if we follow their example, mourning will have no limit at all. Therefore the Ancient Kings and Sages acted to establish some mean, and to regulate ↳ it with a definite interval. As soon as enough
p. 46 time has been allowed to perfect cultivated form and to fulfill the dictates of reason, then mourning was to be put aside. (Knoblock 1994: 70, modified)

People's emotional states are not the same. Extremes must be avoided. The Ancient Kings and Sages adhered to the principle of balanced equilibrium, and they established equitable ritual rules and practices that were based on people's normal feelings. According to Xunzi's understanding, three years of mourning is neither too long nor too short, as it takes into account that "the grief and pain have not ended and thoughts of the dead and longing for him have not been forgotten" (Knoblock 1994: 69). Therefore, he writes in Chapter 19, *Lilun*,

> Rites trim what is too long, stretch out what is too short, eliminate excess, remedy deficiency, and extend cultivated ritual forms that express love and respect so that they increase and complete the beauty of conduct according to morality. (Knoblock 1994: 65, modified)

In order to express normal feelings appropriately, forms of expression must also be fitting. Xunzi writes,

> The utilization of elegant adornment does not go so far as to be sensuous or seductive, nor gross ugliness so far as to produce emaciation or self-neglect. There should be comforting and cheerful music, but not to go so far as to be wayward and abandoned or indolent and rude; there should be weeping and sorrow that aptly expresses one's feelings, but not to go so far as to produce despondency or injury to life. Such is the middle course of ritual. (Knoblock 1994: 65, modified)

The commentator Yang Liang defined "the middle course of ritual" as the Middle Way (*Zhōng Dào* 中道; see Wang 1988: 364). Equilibrium in this sense applies not only to the proper use of materials during funeral rites, but also to measured expressions of human feelings.

Hence, "establishing ritual practices in correspondence with *qing*" means to allow people to express and satisfy their normal feelings in ways appropriate to the actual circumstances of life. Xunzi holds that there are external considerations for the appropriate forms of ritual propriety. He says that one of the main purposes of establishing ritual propriety is that resources are not exhausted by chaotic pursuits of material things (Chapter 19; see Knoblock 1994: 55). Thus, to allow human feelings to be expressed appropriately and in this state of harmony is the most important purpose of ritual practices.

Ritual propriety aims to transform people's natural tendencies so that they live in harmony with themselves, with others in society, and with nature. Ritual rules and practices have to be relevant to such transformations and to be realistic. It is along these lines that
p. 47 we should understand Xunzi's view that "rules of ritual propriety are ↳ established in correspondence with *qing*." This proposition does not suggest that inborn human feelings are the sole criterion for the establishment of ritual practices. Instead, it suggests that the establishment of ritual practices should take into consideration the attributes of human feelings and also pay close attention to the actual conditions of the larger environment to ensure that they are suitable for such transformations. On this understanding, there is no contradiction between Xunzi's view that humans' natural tendencies are bad and his proposition that "rules of ritual propriety are established in correspondence with *qing*."

Having discussed how Xunzi's rules of ritual propriety can be established in correspondence with human feelings, we now can turn to the second dimension of the relationship between *qing* and ritual propriety. Xunzi holds that practicing ritual propriety shapes and channels human feelings in socially appropriate ways. In Chapter 19, *Lilun*, Xunzi articulates his view that acting in accordance with ritual propriety and observing good form and reason is to nurture *qing* (*yǎng qíng* 養情; see Knoblock 1994: 57). Nurturing *qing* means to cultivate the faculties from which *qing* is exerted so they express *qing* in proper forms. Xunzi writes,

> The meaning of ritual propriety is to nurture. The meat of pastured and grain-fed animals, rice and millet, blends and combinations of the five flavors, are what nurture the mouth. The fragrances of peppercorns and orchids, aromas and bouquets, are what nurture the nose. Carved and polished (jade), incised and inlaid (metals), and (fabrics) embroidered with the white and black axe emblem, the azure and black notched-stripe, the azure and crimson stripe, the white and crimson blazon, are what nurture the eye. Bells and drums, flutes and chime-stone, lutes and zithers, reed pipes and reed organs, are what nurture the ear. Spacious rooms, secluded chambers, mats of plaited rushes, couches and bed mats, armrests and cushions, are what nurture the body. Thus ritual propriety is what nurtures. (Knoblock 1994: 55, modified)

The five faculties to be nurtured here are sources of *qing.* In Chapter 11, *Wangba*, Xunzi states that natural human feelings come from the five faculties, namely, the mouth, the nose, the ears, the eyes, and the body (see Knoblock, 1990: 156).[7] When our respective faculties are exposed to various goods in accordance with ritual propriety, our faculties get nurtured. When our faculties are well nurtured, they express our *qing* appropriately. Human desires are responses to *qing*. When *qing* are nurtured, human desires will be adjusted appropriately as well (Knoblock 1994: 55). Consequently, people will desire proper things in proper portions, and human relationships will become orderly and harmonious. Xunzi maintains that the sages were able to nurture their feelings appropriately in order to complete nature's achievement (see Knoblock, 1994: 16).

Xunzi says, the sage kings "*shi yu bi bu qiong hu wu, wu bi bu qu yu yu, liangzhe xiangchi er zhang* 使欲必不窮乎物, 物必不屈於欲, 兩者相持而長." The first two sentences have often been interpreted as saying the same thing, that is, that human desires should not exhaust material goods (e.g., Knoblock 1994: 55; Hutton 2014: 201). This reading, however, is erroneous. The statements should
p. 48 be read literally, more or less ↳ along the line of Dubs' translation: "In order that desire should never be extinguished by things, nor should things be used up by desire" (Dubs 1928: 213). Only such a literal reading of the first two sentences can support the concluding statement here that human desires and material goods ("things") should *mutually* support each other and *grow together*.

If there is to be a mutually sustaining relationship for growth between desires and material goods, it requires not only that desires do not exhaust material goods, but also that desires promote the growth of material goods. We do not refrain from desiring something just because it is not available or there will be no incentive for creation and innovation (see Li 2021). In this regard, Xunzi is not like Daoists, who would like desires to be kept at the minimum or at least within the bounds of available goods. Xunzi wishes to generate material goods for human satisfaction. A flourishing human society is one in which both human desires and material goods for them grow properly. As long as desires are appropriate in accordance with ritual propriety, Xunzi would want society to produce accordingly to satisfy desires. The key consideration here is that human desires must be nurtured in the appropriate way with ritual propriety so that they are neither deprived nor excessive.

To conclude, Xunzi's naturalist ethics is founded on his understanding of human feelings and of the need to accommodate them in appropriate ways. Ethics is manifested in the rules of ritual propriety. When these rules are made in the context of human feelings in connection to their living environment, internally they will be effective in channeling human feelings in appropriate directions, and externally they regulate human relationships in society. Understanding Xunzi's concept of *qing* is key to understanding his moral philosophy.[8]

Notes

1. **For an account of the Confucian concept of *li*, see Li (2007).**
2. **For an interesting account of *yu*, readers can see Sung (2012).**
3. **Chad Hansen also agrees with Graham on this account. See Hansen (1995).**

4. I should note that Graham's book was published in 1986, before the Guodian texts became available.

5. See http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feeling. Accessed May 30, 2014.

6. Knoblock translated this statement as the practice was established to be "equal to the emotions involved" (Knoblock 1994: 69). Hutton translated it as "it takes measure of people's dispositions and establishes a proper form for them" (Hutton 2014: 213).

7. In that chapter Xunzi also includes the organ "*xīn*" or the heart-mind, which is said to seek profit.

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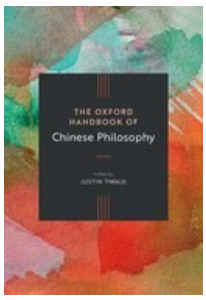

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CHAPTER

4 dai Zhen on the Common Affirmability of Ethical Judgments

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Abstract

DAI Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) is famous for arguing that ethical judgments should be assessed against a standard of common affirmability, a position many later scholars regard as one of the more distinctive, unconventional, or even "modern" features of his thought. But the claim that ethical judgments should be commonly affirmable is poorly understood. It can be read as imposing an impossibly high standard on all moral judgments, as a contract-like ground or foundation for ethical norms, or as an attempt to give greater epistemic weight to the views of ordinary people. There is uncertainty about how rigorously the criterion should be applied and how it justifies Dai's famous proposal that moral judgments should be informed by Golden Rules and empathetic perspective taking. This chapter offers the first fine-grained philosophical account of his common affirmability criterion, arguing that he saw it as a regulative ideal that required insight from empathetic perspective taking but could be applied loosely to justify a variety of epistemic practices that strive to bring personal opinions closer to what concerned parties would commonly affirm. The chapter rejects a variety of simplistic interpretations of the criterion and the contractualist interpretation, but it defends a qualified version of the view that Dai was trying to make his moral epistemology more democratic. This chapter thus takes Dai to be offering a distinctive view that departs from others in the Confucian tradition, not just from the orthodox Song Confucians he criticized but from the canonical thinker Mengzi (Mencius) as well.

Keywords: Dai Zhen, Confucianism, moral epistemology, metaethics, moral contractualism, moral constructivism

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I. Introduction

DÀI Zhèn 戴震 (1724–1777) was a philosopher steeped in the autochthonous Confucian tradition, and yet he often strikes contemporary readers as an usually "modern" Confucian thinker, so much so that in his philosophical afterlife he became an inspiration for reform-minded and revolutionary intellectuals in the late Qing and Republican periods.[1] Some of his seemingly modern views have been explored in recent scholarship.[2] This chapter is about one of the most obvious and yet relatively underexplored candidates for the most outstanding example of Dai's modernity or protomodernity, which I will call his *common affirmability criterion for moral or ethical judgments*.[3]

The short and rough version of the criterion is this: for all judgments that have direct implications for how one should live one's life, those judgments must be based on "invariant norms" that "[human] heart-minds would affirm in common." For this reason, they must appeal to certain shared emotional or affective dispositions that he calls "ordinary human feelings"[4] and draw on our capacity for sympathetic understanding or empathetic perspective taking.[5] If the relevant ethical judgments can't be justified through such ordinary human feelings in a way that could in principle be affirmed by all interested parties, then the judgments won't be sound. Common affirmability seems to make the difference between proper ethical knowledge and mere personal opinions. We check and correct our personal opinions in part by asking whether they would meet the standard of common affirmability (*Evidential Commentary*, Sections 4–5).

This has long been regarded as a centerpiece of DAI Zhen's philosophy, but we do not have anything approaching a satisfying
p. 51 philosophical account of it. As the influential 20th-century philosopher and Confucian interpreter LÁO Sīguāng 勞思光 points out,
↳ Dai clearly intends the criterion to be a distinguishing feature of his account of *lǐ* 理 (pattern or principle), which is itself the chief topic of his last and most influential philosophical treatise, the *Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the* Mengzi (*Mèngzǐ zìyì shūzhèng* 孟子字義疏證). And yet after Lao entertains and then rejects a number of interpretations of the criterion, Lao admits that he himself is not able to discern what it actually means and entails. For example, on one relatively straightforward reading, we might think that Dai basically offers the criterion as way of encouraging people to seek out universal affirmation before proceeding to accept a moral judgment as sound. But surely requiring universal affirmation is impractical: it seems extremely unlikely that there will be a universal consensus about many moral judgments, and no one has the time or other resources to test all of their moral judgments against such a standard.[6] Many other scholars have made reference to the criterion and its significance for Dai's philosophy, but as we will see, we have yet to encounter a careful formulation or articulation of the criterion itself that shows it to be both plausible and consistent with the philosophical writings of DAI Zhen.

The reading of the criterion that I will propose and defend is complicated. Rather than read it simply as a necessary condition to be met in order for one's moral judgment to be considered actionable, I will suggest that it is better understood as a *regulative ideal* that we can approximate or fall short of to various degrees and in various epistemic dimensions. Rather than insist that the criterion requires us to seek out the expressed affirmation of all people, I will argue that Dai understood the criterion more flexibly as establishing that *a variety of ways of surmising shared affirmation* can help improve moral judgments, ways that include (but aren't limited to) empathetically imagining ourselves in the place of others. In the next section (Section II), I will explicate the common affirmability criterion as Dai understood it, in part by providing textual evidence and in part by fine-tuning it in light of objections and worries that would have been obvious to Dai.

Having spelled out and substantiated my reading, I will then (in Section III) compare my interpretation with two tempting readings that occur to scholars largely in retrospect and are sometimes trumpeted as evidence of DAI Zhen's modernity. One of these is the *contractualist* reading, which holds that Dai's thought shared that affirmation or affirmability is the ground or reason in virtue of which ethical norms are normative. Another is the *democratic epistemologist* reading, which says that Dai offered the common affirmability criterion because he wanted decision-makers and other powerful people to give more consideration to the views and interests of ordinary people in making moral judgments. I will reject the contractualist reading outright but accept a qualified and circumscribed (and nonpolitical or noninstitutional) version of the democratic epistemologist reading.

Finally, I will (in Section IV) ask the question that many historians of Confucian and Chinese philosophy want to ask, which has to do with Dai's distinctiveness as a philosopher in the Confucian tradition (prior to its encounters with the West). The phrase that Dai

p. 52 uses to describe common affirmability comes from the *Mengzi* (attributed to ↳ Mengzi 孟子 or Mencius, 4th century BCE), and there are remarks in that canonical text that are suggestive of a similar criterion for moral judgments. I will argue that Dai's articulation and use of common affirmability nevertheless departs meaningfully from what we find in the *Mengzi*, suggesting that Dai was more consistently democratic in his moral epistemology.

II. Common Affirmability in Dai's own Words

To begin with some clarification of terms, I should say that "common affirmation" is my imperfect but approximate translation of a number of terms and phrases that Dai uses, but especially of the phrase *tóng rán* 同然 (to approve or to regard-as-being-so identically or similarly). Arguably, in the hands of other traditional Chinese philosophers, the term *rán* (to approve, to regard-as-being-so) could be read in some contexts as "prefer" or in the intransitive sense as "be so." But as we will see, Dai seems to understand it as requiring, at minimum, a judgment that some particular behavior or way of living is right or correct.[7] Strictly speaking, he thinks that when we "affirm" in his special sense we make a two-part judgment: first, we judge that there are some relevant norms that count as proper or well ordered; second, we judge that some particular thing (e.g., some particular behavior or practice) fits or suits (*yí* 宜) those norms. The first sort of judgment is the judgment that the norms are patterns of good order, which is his gloss on the technical term *li* 理 (commonly translated as "pattern" or "principle"). The second sort of judgment is the judgment that the particular thing is "right" (*yì* 義). Roughly, the first sort of judgment determines that a general picture of how we ought to live or behave is based on a clear understanding of the relevant distinctions between the key features of that picture and its alternatives, and the second sort of judgment determines that particular behavior or practice falls under the more general picture.[8] Dai does not spell out exactly what he means by *common* affirmation, but we can at least say that when a certain number of people commonly affirm a judgment, they *all* affirm it, which is to say that they all take it to be right and consistent with the basic patterns of good order. There is some question about the scope or range of people who must affirm a particular judgment. Dai sometimes writes as though common affirmation would, at least ideally, be universal in scope—all people of all times would say of a particular behavior or practice that it is correct and cannot be changed (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 2). But more often, he is more realistic and writes as though we can draw boundaries around those who would or would not be affected by our ethical behaviors, asking only whether those affected would affirm (*Evidential Commentary*, Sections 2, 4, and 5). Since it is not certain that the scope is always meant to be universal, I will be focusing on *common* affirmation rather than *universal* affirmation. Furthermore, Dai believes that
p. 53 ethical judgments should be *affirmable* in principle or in some hypothetical sense, not actually ↳ affirmed. On my understanding of Dai, to suggest that actual affirmation is always required would be overly demanding and impractical. Finally, I take Dai to be concerned with *actionable* moral judgments in particular—ones that we apply to our own ethically significant decision-making, ones that become the basis for ethical action in our own lives. This is to be contrasted with moral judgments about historical events and hypothetical scenarios, which of course can have bearing on actionable moral judgments but aren't the direct object of analysis in this study.

Dai offers common affirmability as a way of grasping *lǐ* 理 (pattern, principle), an important but—for Dai—widely misunderstood term in postclassical Confucian philosophy. Roughly, it refers to some norms or sources of norms in virtue of which behaviors and character traits can be good, morally right, or virtuous. A major aim of Dai's *Evidential Commentary* is to establish that one comes to know the content of the *li* by striving for *common* affirmability and not just by relying on one's own judgment. The tendency to think that one can grasp the content by relying on one's own judgment is, by Dai's lights, traceable to the mischief of the "Song Confucians," founders of a moral and philosophical orthodoxy that had prevailed for more than four centuries (the most important of these Song Confucians is ZHŪ Xī 朱熹 [1130–1200], whose views became state orthodoxy in 1313–1315). On Dai's reading of history, the Song Confucians made the mistake of assuming that patterns were somehow fully endowed in each individual's heart-mind, so that any individual could in principle know what was good or bad, virtuous or vicious (etc.), without recourse to external sources of knowledge, including the affirmations (or disaffirmations) of others. Dai makes this point in a written conversation with a fictional interlocutor, in a passage that I will call *Affirm in Common*:

> *Affirm in Common*

> Question: The *Mengzi* says, "The patterns of good order [*li*] and rightness [*yi*] are that which heart-minds would affirm in common. The sages were just the first to grasp that which our heart-minds would affirm in common."[9] Here the patterns [*li*] are also described in terms of the heart-mind [just like for the Song Confucians]. What about that?
>
> Answer: Only if it's what heart-minds affirm *in common* can it be called a pattern of good order and right. That which does not reach to what's affirmed in common and still inheres in one's personal opinions is neither a pattern of good order nor right. When one person regards something as so and the myriad generations of people throughout the world would say "this is correct and cannot be changed," this is what is meant by "affirmed in common."[10]

There are various ways in which we might use common affirmability to describe or account for (*yán* 言) the patterns of good order. The one that figures most prominently in this passage is as a way of coming to know the content of those patterns. For example, if I want to know how to go about settling a property dispute between families, should I rely on my own best judgment or strive to arrive
p. 54 at a settlement that all could affirm? In ↳ the *Affirm in Common* passage, the phrase "what heart-minds would affirm in common" suggests the latter sort of answer. Moreover, he proposes that figuring out what is commonly affirmable helps make the difference between a sound moral judgment as mere personal opinion (*yìjiàn* 意見). Common affirmability has a clear epistemic role or function.

An important issue in making sense of Dai's criterion has to do with the role of perspective-taking empathy, understood minimally as the act of reconstructing the points of view of others and imagining or simulating their thoughts, feelings, and desires. In *Affirm in Common* (quoted earlier), one gets the impression that Dai thinks we should go out and check with other people to confirm whether our moral judgments are sound or not. But famously, Dai also argues that empathizing with other people is an important requirement for grasping or coming to know the content of the patterns of good order. In a passage that I will call *Perspective-Taking*, Dai describes a method that seems to have little to do with checking with others, a method that seems to be largely or entirely internal to individual agents:

> *Perspective-Taking:*
>
> The patterns of good are feelings (*qíng* 情) that are not in error. There has never been a case of getting a pattern while not getting people's genuine feelings (*qing*).[11] So when one has some matter that would affect others, one should turn within oneself and reflect tranquilly, "If someone else were to affect me in this way, would I be able to accept it?" Whenever one imposes some responsibility on others, one should turn within oneself and reflect tranquilly, "If someone else were to impose this responsibility on me, would I be able to fully exert myself to fulfill it?" When one applies the measure of the self to others, the patterns become clear.[12]

As I read the secondary literature on DAI Zhen, most interpreters assume that the methods implied by *Affirm in Common* and the methods recommended in passages like *Perspective-Taking* are compatible, perhaps even two different ways of describing the very same method. Although most interpreters take this compatibility for granted, LAO Siguang takes it as a difficult (and ultimately insoluble) interpretive problem. One can see why Lao is puzzled. At first pass, it looks like *Affirm in Common* is recommending that I should go out and discover the *expressed* views of others. As Dai says at the end of the passage, "When one person regards something as so and the myriad generations of people throughout the world would say 'this is correct and cannot be changed,' this is what is meant by 'affirmed in common.' " But in *Perspective-Taking*, it looks like discovering the expressed views of others isn't necessary after all, and I can figure out what others would affirm by reflecting tranquilly on how I would feel if I were in their place. For Lao, the method suggested by *Affirm in Common* is unworkable. It is extremely unlikely that there could be universal agreement across the generations about anything, and we don't have the means to discover what all would affirm anyway. Since discovering expressed views is unworkable, Lao then speculates that the phrase "what heart-minds affirm in common" should be taken to "refer
p. 55 to some sort of ability ↳ possessed by the 'heart-minds' of every person" (Lao 2021: 822). That is, he suggests that we read "what heart-minds affirm in common" to be something discoverable internally, without checking the expressed views of others, presumably through the application of empathy or Golden Rules as described in passages like *Perspective-Taking*.[13]

Let us consider a different way of understanding "what heart-minds affirm in common" and its relationship to making sound moral judgments. Rather than specifying any particular procedure or method, we might take it to refer to an *open-ended regulative ideal*.

As a *regulative ideal*, it's not always a simple test that our personal opinions can clearly pass or fail, but an ideal that is worth striving for nonetheless, even if we can only approximate it to some degree. As *open-ended*, it does not commit us to any particular method or procedure. By accepting the ideal, we accept that common affirmability can and should enter into our deliberations in multifaceted ways, giving us reasons to doubt or have confidence in our personal opinions. For example, if I decide on a certain policy for late assignments and a student objects to the policy, that could give me reasons to doubt my judgment that the policy is correct. And if I tranquilly reflect on whether I would accept the policy were I in the student's place and I conclude in good faith that I would, that gives me reason to believe that my views about the policy aren't just my personal opinion, but also right and in accordance with the patterns of good order. Perhaps I sometimes need the testimony of others in order to successfully imagine "what it's like" to be in their place, such that I can then better appreciate the reasons for and against a particular judgment for myself.[14] Insofar as I have reason to believe that all people of all times would say "this is correct and cannot be changed," I have reason to believe a moral judgment correct. And insofar as I have reason to believe that my moral judgments wouldn't reach that high standard, I have reason to doubt and revise my judgments. On this reading, when Dai says that common affirmability points to a situation where all people of all times would say "this is correct and cannot be changed," he understands it as an ideal that we can approximate or fall short of to various degrees and in various respects, not as a necessary condition or a simple test to which we must submit all of our actionable moral judgments. This strikes me as the more natural way to read the criterion, given the extraordinary demands of the criterion as Dai describes it in *Affirm in Common* and other passages that use similarly demanding language.[15] Surely Dai understood that people cannot ordinarily confirm that all of their actionable moral judgments would be affirmed by all people of all times.

On this interpretation, I cannot always know whether a particular judgment meets that standard. Perhaps I can be quite confident about some judgments—for example, about letting someone in my charge starve when I have the power and resources to prevent it (*Evidential Commentary*, Sections 2 and 40). But in other cases, I will have to adjust my confidence according to the circumstances or treat the reasons that are justified by the criterion more tentatively as pro tanto or defeasible reasons. Perhaps I don't have enough recent experience as a student to have great confidence in my own perspective-taking abilities regarding late assignments, or perhaps there is evidence that the student who objects to my policy is motivated by a deep prejudice or self-serving bias. In those cases, I
p. 56 would take my reasons as more qualified or adjust my credence in many of the ↳ ways familiar to people who work with probabilistic epistemologies nowadays—for example, adjusting my credence upward or downward depending on how knowledgeable or wise a given affirmer or naysayer may be.[16]

I consider this reading of the criterion much more promising than its rivals, but it is still not quite right. What is right about is that it treats the criterion as a regulative ideal. But I think the open-endedness has been somewhat overstated. On the view as described, the reason that Dai recommends using the criterion is because it justifies a variety of ways of making our personal opinions more sound, any of which we can use (so long as they give us good reasons to think that the heart-minds of others would affirm or deny our moral judgments). But of those various ways, Dai treats perspective taking or Golden Rule procedures as far more central and important than other possible ways of approximating the ideal of common affirmability. For example, Dai frequently suggests that the classical Confucian notion of *shù* 恕 (empathy, or empathetic perspective taking) and various classical formulations of Golden and Silver Rules describe some sort of indispensable ingredient of good moral decision-making.[17] In contrast, he only occasionally mentions hearing the expressed views of others as a way of improving on personal opinions. For example, Dai worries that without his preferred vision of proper moral judgment, overconfident decision-makers won't have reasons to take naysayers into account.[18] Another passage suggests that his epistemology is meant to give weight to things like the "cries of those who suffer from cold and hunger" (*jīhán háohū* 饑寒號呼) and the "grief" or "grievances" (*āiyùan* 哀怨) of people without the means to form intimate relationships (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 40). These latter cases suggest that hearing the expressed views of others can sometimes be a valuable means or way of grasping what heart-minds would affirm in common, but it doesn't seem to be required in every case, nor does it appear to be as central to his moral epistemology as empathetic perspective taking.

With this in mind, let me propose a somewhat less open-ended regulative ideal. Instead of saying that Dai's criterion recommends *any* method so long as it helps to track what heart-minds would affirm in common, we should say that it recommends any constellation of methods that help to track what heart-minds affirm in common, so long as they take account of proper empathetic perspective taking. So if I am a city manager trying to decide how to provide services to my constituents, I might solicit their opinions directly, talk to advocates or representatives, or draw on experiences of my own that are relevantly similar to those of my

constituents, but at the very least I must also have imagined myself in the place of my constituents and figured out what I would have wanted under those circumstances, or I must be following a rule or acting on a habit shaped by such exercises of empathetic perspective taking (I will say more about this last clause in the next paragraph). Why would Dai want to insist that empathetic perspective taking is always required? I see two important reasons. First, making our personal opinions more sound (that is, certain or very likely to be true or correct) isn't the only thing that Dai wants from his moral epistemology. Another likely reason to require empathetic perspective-taking is because it is *a necessary condition for ethical value*, especially for the chief virtue of humaneness
p. 57 (*rén* 仁). This is because humaneness ↳ by its very nature is motivated by care or concern for others, care or concern that itself requires empathetic perspective taking. If I provide services for my constituents without any personal understanding of their situation or concern for their welfare (maybe I just ask a trusted friend, "what should I do?," and then just follow her advice), that's not humane virtue, even if it might give rise to the right policy or behavior. Dai clearly suggests that one must engage in empathetic perspective taking (*shu*) in order to become humane.[19] More speculatively, I also propose (as a second reason why empathetic perspective taking is always required) that Dai sees empathetic perspective taking as the only way to make assessments of fairness—that is, as the only way to determine whether a behavior or policy fairly fulfills or realizes the interests of the people affected. Dai seems to envision the ideal sort of perspective taking as one that breaks interests down into basic, easily relatable, and widely shared desires, such as desires for food or companionship, and then aims to determine whether a particular course of action strikes the right balance between the interests of multiple parties. As Dai explains shortly after the passage that I have been calling *Perspective-Taking*, "one uses one's own genuine feelings to take measurement of the genuine feelings of others, so that all parties get what's fair and correct."[20] A norm of fairness seems to be a critical feature or element of the patterns of good order on Dai's account, and Dai refers to empathetic perspective taking (*shu*) as way of instantiating a kind of fair consideration (*píngshù* 平恕).[21] I suspect that Dai thinks there is no reliable way to strike the right balance between competing desires or interests except by having one-and-the-same heart-mind take up multiple perspectives and compare them internally.

It is tempting to say that on this revised reading of common affirmability, it requires that we always empathetically take up the perspectives of the concerned parties before acting on our moral judgments. But to apply the requirement so rigorously seems unrealistic. There are many moments in the day when I act on judgments that concern others but don't actually take the time to imagine how others would feel. Sometimes it's too obvious to bother—I know how my friends or colleagues would feel if I failed to show up for a promised appointment, and I usually just make it a rule to show up by the promised time, without bothering to imagine their reactions. In addition to being unrealistic, the rigoristic interpretation appears to contradict some of Dai's views about moral deliberation. Dai seems to allow that some moral deliberation is necessarily automatic and implicit. In the closing sections of his *Evidential Commentary*, he discusses in depth the traditional Confucian idea of using "discretion" or "weighing" (*quán* 權) to make context-specific moral judgments about the relative ethical importance or weight of various competing considerations or concerns. As he puts it there, there are situations where the relative weights are "constant" (*cháng* 常) and obvious, so that no occurrent weighing is required (think of a person making a routine appointment for work). But there are other situations where the relative weights will vary from what's normal or standard (think of someone who encounters an emergency on en route to a routine work appointment). These latter situations call for a reassessment of the relative weights, which seems to be accomplished through a
p. 58 combination of wisdom and empathetic perspective taking (*Evidential Commentary*, ↳ Sections 40–41). Presumably, in the situations where the weights are constant and obvious (*chang*), occurrent perspective taking is not required. But this doesn't entail that judgments in those situations must be completely uninformed by perspective-taking empathy. For one thing, we could have rules of thumb that were themselves created in response to moments of empathetic insight. Perhaps I once saw for myself how frustrating it is to be kept waiting for a dinner appointment without notification, so I know that generally speaking I should take pains to make dinner appointments. The psychologist Martin Hoffman proposes that we begin acquiring empathic "scripts" at an early age, often prompted by "how would you feel if … ?" questions from our parents, and then later deploy them without occurrent "role-taking" imagining of ourselves in the place of others.[22] Prompted by my mother to consider how I would feel if I were publicly mocked for my hair or other cosmetic attributes, I can later know the relative weight of being publicly mocked for such things (relative to the fun of the mockers) without going to the trouble of imagining it. These are ways of making moral judgments that are sufficiently informed or shaped by past acts of empathetic perspective taking, but that do not presuppose or require *occurrent* empathetic perspective taking, and they are consonant with Dai's views on deliberation and automaticity in moral decision-making.

One way to read Dai's remarks on the common affirmability criterion consistently is as follows: what is required for a good-faith attempt to reach for common affirmability is fair consideration of the feelings of other interested parties, which Dai envisions in the

ideal case as a kind of tranquil act of empathetic perspective taking from multiple perspectives—setting aside one's more heated and immediate concerns to consider the matter more coolly from multiple points of view, and finding a balanced solution that all would ideally affirm (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 2). This ideal situation presupposes that all concerned parties would engage in the same sort of tranquil perspective taking, so that all would converge on the correct view by giving the same objective or impartial consideration to the interests of others as to themselves. But of course, our time and energy are limited, so that ideal sort of empathetic perspective-taking isn't usually practical (or possible). In those cases, how one best achieves fair consideration of others' feelings will vary according to one's circumstances. Quite often, he implies, the weights of the relevant values will be obvious, and we can just rely on long-standing habits or rules of thumb, reserving occurrent perspective taking as a backup when the habits or rules of thumb won't suffice (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 40). Sometimes it will be useful or even necessary to hear the expressed views of others. No matter what, Dai thinks that proper empathetic perspective taking should have played a certain causal role in informing the judgment-making practices that we deploy in the spur of the moment, but the spur-of-the-moment practices will vary according to specific demands and features of the situation. That is why empathetic perspective taking tends to take center stage, and other ways of taking account of the interests and views of others—such as hearing their views or grievances—are only
p. 59 mentioned occasionally. Even so, as Dai sees it, the common affirmability ↳ criterion helps to justify all of the other-regarding epistemic practices that he is so eager to promote.

III. Two Readings of Dai Zhen on Common Affirmability

i. The Contractualist Reading

For present-day philosophers and intellectual historians, there is a significant temptation to read common affirmation not just as a way of coming to know the content of the patterns (as an epistemic criterion or norm) but also as a way of accounting for the existence, nature, or truth, of norms themselves (as an ontological ground or truthmaker). One way to motivate this temptation is to think about the ways that we now problematize ethical norms as a whole class or set. For example, there are some philosophers who say that ethical norms can't exist in the same way that things like trees, weather, and the law of gravity exists, and so some suggest that they must exist in some more dependent or derivative way—for example, in the will of a divine being, or (more to the point) in intersubjective agreements between people. The issues here are complex, but I am going to sidestep most of them and just stipulate that there is a possible reading of common affirmability in DAI Zhen, which takes Dai to be using common affirmability to solve metaethical problems having to do with the nature, existence, or truth of ethical norms as a class. According to this reading, Dai wants to avoid invoking some transcendent or metaphysical ground for his norms, and so he arrives instead at the idea that ethical norms are by their very nature intersubjective. It is because we agree or would agree to certain rules of behavior that they are normative for us. According to this view, Dai doesn't think that ethical norms are grounded in the will of the gods or in a transcendent pattern (*li*) but instead are grounded in what people do or would ideally affirm in the interest of fair cooperation with one another. For convenience, I will call this the *contractualist* reading of common affirmability.[23]

Dai's views about the ground of the patterns (*li*) are difficult to state without taking our discussion too far afield. To be sure, he is deeply and systematically committed to showing that ethical norms can be given an accounting that grounds them on down-to-earth things like shared human feelings and natural relationships rather than transcendent or metaphysical things like the Song Confucian notion of pattern. But his metaethical alternative is hard to describe succinctly. To give readers a sense of the difficulty, Dai sometimes describes his own understanding of the foundations of ethics by saying that on his view, ethical norms "exist" or "inhere in" (*zài* 在) the affairs of the world (*shì* 事) and in *qing* 情.[24] The last of these terms is frequently and aptly translated as "feelings" or "emotions" in many contexts but sometimes refers to the true or genuine nature of the affairs themselves. Because Dai uses *qing*
p. 60 in both senses, his comments tend to frustrate readers looking for a ↳ clear and direct answer to questions about the nature of pattern's existence—for example, whether patterns are partially subjective or dependent on the contingencies of people's heart-minds. For present purposes, it should be enough to note that Dai is acutely aware of the difference between the epistemic uses of common affirmability and the more ambitious ontological claim that patterns are *in* or *inhere in* (*zai*) common affirmability. In one passage, Dai answers the ontological question by comparing the inherence (*zai*) of patterns to the inherence of flavors or sounds—just as the flavors inhere in the food and the sounds inhere in various external objects, so too do patterns inhere in the affairs (*shi*)

that they directly pertain to.[25] As I read Dai, he does allow that that the specific content of the patterns depends on certain essential and shared features of human heart-minds, just as the public perception that "sugar is sweet" depends on certain essential and shared features of human tongues. But Dai would still insist that this allowance not be conflated with claims about what patterns inhere in (*zai*) and what they ontologically depend on. Insofar as the flavors of a dish of food inhere in anything, they inhere in the food. Something similar is supposed to be true for patterns and the affairs that they directly pertain to. In any case, the upshot for our purposes is that Dai does not go so far as to take common affirmation or common affirmability as an ontological ground of ethical norms. Dai denies that patterns inhere in the common affirmations of people.

The contractualist reading is problematic in other respects too. On most contractualist views, intersubjective agreement gets its normative power from the fact that people choose or consent to the agreement. For example, just as we take our consensual promise to meet a friend for dinner at an appointed time to be binding for us (the promisers), so too do we see our choice to engage with others on moral terms as binding for us. To the extent that contractualist theories necessarily make choice and consent important factors in accounting for the normative force of morality, Dai's theory doesn't qualify as contractualist. To affirm some judgment in Dai's sense is to regard it as morally correct on the basis of one's own ethical faculties and, for that reason, to prefer it. There is no indication that choosing or consenting plays an important role in determining what is to be affirmed or affirmable, just as there is no indication that choosing or consenting to regard certain kinds of foods as delicious play an important role in determining that they are delicious. Furthermore, for Dai the foundational norms are "invariant norms" or "unchanging norms" (*búyì zhī zé* 不易之則) rather than ones that can vary with the contingencies of human volition, and Dai writes as though the norms can be discovered by sages in advance of knowing anything about people's choices (*Evidential Commentary*, Sections 3, 4, 21, and 25). Even if we wanted to make the case that he tacitly assumes some sort of choice or consent, there is very little to suggest that ethical judgments are normative in virtue of being chosen or consented to. It is quite possible that Dai's "affirmation" (*ran*) is no more volitional or "chosen" than assenting to certain compelling truths is volitional or chosen. Just as we automatically accept that it is raining outside when it is, or that a vertical line is straight up and down when we see that that it aligns with a plumb line, so too the ethical values that are commonly affirmed compel ideal epistemic agents to assent to truth of those values.[26]

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ii. Reading Dai as a Democratic Moral Epistemologist

If Dai didn't recommend the common affirmability criterion for contractualist reasons, perhaps he recommended it as a way of guaranteeing that our moral deliberations take greater account of the interests and views of others. More precisely, maybe he wanted people who have power over others to more regularly consider the interests of the people in their power, and to give more epistemic weight to their perspectives and interests.[27] Dai often bemoaned the fact that powerful people seemed to give so little consideration to the desires and grievances of the people under their power, and he complained that the moral orthodoxy of his day didn't allow decision-makers to give them much consideration. Let us call this the *democratic moral epistemologist reading.*

In some respects, this reading is uncontroversial. It is evident, for example, in the way that he frequently steers his critique of the moral orthodoxy toward its implications for the powerless. As he characterizes the orthodox view, decision-makers have no good reasons to take the complaints or grievances of their subjects into consideration, and in fact they are permitted to discount most such complaints and grievances, because they tend to be easily and justifiably interpreted as expressions of self-interest or self-serving desires, which on the orthodox view (as Dai understands it) makes them unreliable and justly ignored (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 10). So long as the decision-makers themselves aren't problematically motivated by self-serving desires, Dai suggests, those decision-makers don't have any reason to take the grievances or objections of their subordinates into account.[28] Dai articulates version of this critique in various places, but a succinct description of it appears in a passage that I will call *The Powerful Decide.*

> *The Powerful Decide*
>
> Nowadays, even the most foolish of people who engage in perversion and self-indulgence, immediately invoke the patterns of good order when making managerial decisions or holding another person accountable…. Consequently, what is a "pattern of good order" will stretch forward for those who are domineering, take advantage of their influential positions, or speak eloquently, and will bend backward for those who are weak, timid, or tongue-tied. Alas, who could say that it is against the patterns of good order to regulate affairs or manage others in this way? We might even take

> someone who is honest and self-possessed and whose mind has no private inclinations toward evil, yet when it comes time to make managerial decisions or hold someone accountable, he will rely on his own personal opinions, taking what he himself affirms to be right and what he himself rejects to be wrong. He may believe himself to have a strict disposition, have an upright nature, and despise bad tendencies as though a personal foe, but he will not understand how difficult it is to fully grasp [the patterns of good order in] such affairs, how easy it is for judgments of right and wrong to slip into bias. People will often be harmed by him without his ever becoming aware of it, or he will see it clearly only after the matter has passed and it is too late for regrets. Alas, who could say that it is against the patterns of good order to regulate affairs or manage others in this way? (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 5, modified from Tiwald and Van Norden 2014: 326)

p. 62 Furthermore, advocating for the powerless seems to have been a large part of Dai's conception of himself as a Confucian scholar and thinker. In the closing section of the *Evidential Commentary* and even in a deathbed letter written to his cherished friend and student DUÀN Yùcái 段玉裁 (1735–1815), he declares that his primary aim has been to compel the powerful to reduce the harm and neglect of the people (*mín* 民).[29] As scholars of China have long observed, Dai is a rarity among the major Confucian philosophers in having come from humble roots, spending many of his years at the mercy of wealthier and better-connected people and their fickle moral pronouncements.[30]

With all of this evidence in mind, it seems relatively safe to say that Dai recommends the common affirmability criterion in part (probably in large part) because it helps to ensure that decision-makers will take greater account of the interests of ordinary people, particularly the desire-based interests that he thinks will be well captured by tranquil reflection on Golden Rules or empathetic perspective-taking. However, the democratic reading as I have described it says not just that his method is meant to compel decision-makers to take better account of ordinary people's *interests*, but also that it's meant to make them take better account of ordinary people's *views.* Is there evidence to suggest that he wanted the latter as well?

On this issue, I think Dai's position is more ambiguous. As we can see in *The Powerful Decide*, he is at least somewhat concerned with establishing that powerful people should take more seriously the criticisms of others, presumably including the criticisms of their subordinates, who will be most motivated to call attention to bad decision-making by the powerful. As Dai asks twice, if the powerful accept the orthodox view, then "who could say that it is against the patterns of good to regulate affairs or manage others in this way?" Presumably, Dai doesn't mean to suggest that no one will ever criticize the powerful for bad decisions but, rather, that the powerful have no particular reason to take criticisms as reasons to doubt their judgments. As we saw in Section II, taking criticisms as reasons to doubt our moral judgments *is* one of the points of accepting Dai's criterion. However, we also saw that Dai was rather flexible about how moral agents discern or discover what others would affirm. He seems to acknowledge that it will sometimes be useful to hear the expressed views of others, but empathetic perspective-taking is far more central. Furthermore, Dai often seems to have a kind of serene confidence that merely introspective perspective-taking can successfully close the gap between moral agents and the people whose feelings and desires they aim to reconstruct or imagine (*Evidential Commentary,* Sections 2, 11, 13). But sometimes, when we imagine what others might be willing to affirm under better circumstances, we will tend to imagine them affirming values that already suit us or serve us well. Vast experience with the difficult art of surmising what friends or loved ones might consent to or approve tells us that we often get it wrong (and sneak out own preferences or biases through the back door), and this happens even more easily with people we know less intimately. On many understandings of the word "democratic," it is not enough for decision-makers just to take account of the interests of ordinary people through empathetic perspective taking; they also need to take account of the expressed views of the ordinary people, precisely because expressed views can serve as a corrective to
p. 63 our wrongheaded or inadequate ↳ attempts to surmise what is in their interests. Dai does not offer a theory of moral knowledge or judgment that requires soliciting or discovering the expressed views of others in any systematic or rigorous way. Nor does he say anything about institutionalizing or requiring political leaders to take account of the views of ordinary people.

There is, however, one more respect in which Dai is plausibly read as taking a step toward more democratic moral epistemology, and this has to do with the role of idealization in his theory of moral decision-making and moral judgment. According to Dai, one of the reasons that the moral orthodoxy tends to discount or neglect the feelings and desires of ordinary people is because it tends to hold them to high moral standards. By doing so, it treats their ordinary desires (for a stable home or companionship, for example) as illegitimate or inconsistent with the patterns of good order. One of the running themes in Dai's philosophy, even in its earliest

iterations, is to establish that certain basic and normal human desires are characteristic of sages as much as they are of ordinary people, that this follows from the fact that anyone can say "the sages and I are of the same kind" (聖人與我同類者), and that this similarity or overlap in basic desires is critical to understanding the phrase "what all human heart-minds affirm in common."[31] Dai sometimes characterizes his opponents as making the mistake of so idealizing the quality of being sagely (*shèng* 聖) that they lose sight of the fact that the sages are, in final analysis, sagely *humans* (*shèngrén* 聖人). Certain feelings and desires are definitive of being human, and the orthodox sagely ideal doesn't allow sages those essential human dispositions.[32] Dai also goes out of his way to argue that even moral paragons have some self-interested desires.[33] Dai's systematic effort to make the moral ideal more consistent with the feelings, desires, and beliefs of ordinary people also reads quite naturally as an attempt to give more consideration to the interests and views of ordinary people. This may seem like a rather modest step toward more democratic moral epistemology, but it will become an important distinguishing feature of Dai's thought when we look at it in historical context, as we will do next.

IV. Comparing Dai's Use of Common Affirmability with Mengzi's

In point of historical fact, it isn't all that unusual in the Confucian tradition to pay some lip service to the common affirmability of certain ethical norms. That is because many Confucian philosophers follow Mengzi, whose highly influential text is itself the source of the claim that the patterns of good order (*li*) and rightness (*yi*) are "what heart-minds affirm in common" (*Mengzi* 6A7). By the mid-Qing when Dai lived, the *Mengzi* had long been regarded as an authoritative part of the Confucian canon, and many Confucian writers had endorsed some version of this view, quoting or paraphrasing the very phrase "what heart-minds affirm in common." This
p. 64 then raises questions about whether DAI Zhen's use of the common affirmability criterion is really all that distinctive, ↳ unconventional, or "modern," as many of Dai's enthusiastic proponents believe. Perhaps many of the major Confucian philosophers —including Mengzi himself—were just as committed to taking account of the views and interests of ordinary people as Dai was. In the space remaining, I will do my best to pinpoint what is historically distinctive about Dai's use of common affirmability by comparing his views with those attributed to Mengzi (or those found in the text that bears his name).

To start, notice an ambiguity in the comparison between Dai's use of common affirmability and Mengzi's. There are at least two ways of arguing that "what heart-minds affirm in common" has some bearing on moral epistemology and moral judgment, which we might crudely characterize as *arguments for warrant* and *arguments for necessity.* If I want to know whether it is foggy outside my windowless office, one of the ways I can get a reliable answer is by asking someone who just came from outside and has no particular motive to lie to me. So, for purposes of knowing whether it is foggy outside, I am warranted in taking the testimony of others as reasons to believe that it is (or isn't) foggy. But this is not to say that asking others is required or necessary in order to determine whether it's foggy outside. There are other ways that I could go about it, one of which is to get up and take a look for myself. Similarly, just because a philosopher says that all sound moral judgments are ones that are commonly affirmable in principle, it doesn't follow that they think one should in all cases strive to make one's personal opinions conform to what's commonly affirmable or should use common affirmation as way of acquiring knowledge.

If we look at the way the two philosophers introduce the phrase "what heart-minds affirm in common," we see some preliminary evidence that they put it to subtly different uses in their moral epistemologies. In the *Mengzi*, Mengzi's primary concern is to show that the ways of life picked out by "patterns of good order" and "rightness" please people's heart-minds in common, just as delectable foods please people's mouths in common, beautiful people like the handsome Zidu please people's eyes in common, and so on (*Mengzi* 6A7). He does not explicitly propose to treat any methods of discovering what's commonly affirmed as a requirement. To be sure, by endorsing the view that patterns of good order and rightness are commonly affirmable, Mengzi begins to make the case that we could reasonably take the views and interests of ordinary people as reasons for believing some judgments about patterns and rightness to be sound (or unsound). But that would be an argument for warrant, not an argument for necessity. It would be akin to establishing that other people are reliable (but not exclusive) sources of answers to the question of whether it is foggy outside. Mengzi's point is simply to show that patterns and good order are coextensive with what's commonly affirmable: "What is that heart-minds affirm in common? I say that it's the patterns of good order and it's rightness."[34] As one recent scholar of DAI Zhen has pointed out, however, Dai's claim is stronger, because he suggests that the soundness of a judgment of pattern and rightness is conditional on its being commonly affirmable: "*Only if* it's what heart-minds affirm in common can it then [*shǐ* 始] be called a pattern of good order and right."[35] The stronger formulation hints at or points to arguments for necessity.

p. 65 Indeed, Dai does insist that the common affirmability criterion should be applied to all of our moral judgments. As we saw in Section II of this chapter, the most plausible reading of the criterion is that it requires that we take various steps to ensure that our personal opinions really would be commonly affirmed, and specifically requires that our judgments be shaped or informed by empathetic perspective taking. Furthermore, some of the arguments that Dai offers in defense of the criterion are best read as arguments for necessity, not (just) for warrant. Consider the argument that Dai makes in the passage I have called *The Powerful Decide* (see Section III). On a natural reading of that passage, Dai is suggesting that we need common affirmability to solve a problem that I will call *the need for external traction.* Here is the problem: when we encounter a situation and make a judgment about what to do, we can only be fully confident in that initial judgment if we are sages. But we are not sages, and so we can't take that initial judgment to be right. In order to confirm, disconfirm, or revise the judgment, we need some standard or basis by which to judge the judgment. According to Dai, the moral orthodoxy doesn't provide any such basis. All it can recommend to us is that we check to see if our initial judgment was well motivated—that is, if it was driven by a sincere commitment to virtue or truth and not by problematic desires or self-serving biases. So, we need some other way of checking to see whether that initial judgment is sound, and Dai implies that checking for common affirmability is the only plausible way. As he says in *The Powerful Decide*, the powerful could even look inward and find nothing but impeccably honest and pure motives and yet still end up inflicting great harm upon the people without realizing their mistake until it's too late (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 5). In other passages, Dai suggests that without common affirmability to provide traction, people wouldn't even know where to look for plausible standards of self-correction, so that they would be left searching in vain until their hair turns white (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 13). Dai's appeal to the need for external traction is an argument for necessity; it suggests that common affirmability is the only defensible criterion by which we could confirm, disconfirm, or revise our initial, unreliable judgments. There is no equivalent argument in the *Mengzi.*[36]

What I have tried to show so far is that Mengzi at best points to arguments for warrant and not arguments for necessity for taking "what all heart-minds affirm in common" as an epistemic standard for moral judgments. The most we can say is that Mengzi thinks it's true that all moral judgments are commonly affirmable in principle, which gives us license to invoke the views and perspectives of others as reasons for or against moral judgments, even if it doesn't consistently require that we do so. We might think that his implied argument for warrant is still a significant step toward more democratic moral epistemology. Maybe so, but even in this arena, I find that Mengzi's democratic commitments likely fall short of Dai's.

In several passages in the *Mengzi*, Mengzi aims to convince his audiences that it is a mark of a person's virtue, good leadership, or goodness in other ethical senses that the people like and approve of a person or their behavior. But as I read the text, Mengzi is not always clear about whether the people like and approve of good people because they tend to be rewarded and benefited by them, or
p. 66 because he thinks the ethical judgments ↳ of ordinary people are reasonably reliable. In the case of the people's approval of virtuous leaders, at least, the evidence strongly suggests that he cares about their approval insofar as it reflects their sense that life goes well under their leadership and not because he has any confidence in their judgments about good governance or political virtues (Tiwald 2008). In the famous passage that became the locus classicus of the phrase "what [human] heart-minds affirm in common," Mengzi seems to have in mind the sort of affirmation that could be interpreted as a sign of preference, not the sort of affirmation that could be interpreted as a sign of good ethical judgment in its own right. Mengzi likens the preferences of the human heart-mind to the preferences of the human mouth for delectable foods or the human ear for fine music (*Mengzi* 6A7). In contrast, Dai is clear that the reason we should take seriously the affirmations of other people is that we should have some qualified confidence in their moral judgment. He is explicit that the heart-mind's tendency to delight in good order and rightness is a direct consequence of affirming those things as right.[37] He reads the relevant sense of "affirming" (*ran*) as consisting of a two-part judgment that something is a pattern of good order and that a particular practice or behavior fits the pattern (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 2). And he maintains that in some profound sense, everyone is born with a certain minimum of the faculties necessary for moral understanding. To use Dai's analogy, everyone has a flame that they can use to shed light on specific patterns, when in close enough proximity. Some people may have larger flames that can shed light on more patterns than can others, and some people may have flames that shed a more intense light that enables them to see the patterns more clearly than others. But the metaphor clearly suggests that it is in virtue of people's faculties of moral understanding that we should consider their judgments to be somewhat reliable, and not just because they have a taste or preference for the benefits doled out by people who are nice to them (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 6). At the very least, we can say that by making explicit the argument from external traction, Dai commits himself to greater consistency about giving epistemic weight to the ethical judgments of ordinary people.

Another subtle point of departure has to do with the danger of overly idealized moral standards, mentioned briefly in the previous section. As described there, Dai thinks it important to establish that the feelings and desires of sages and ethical paragons are similar to the feelings and desires of ordinary people. An important reason for doing so is to establish that the powerful can't invoke impossibly high or self-abnegating ideals to condemn ordinary people for many of their ordinary interests. If it turns out that sages also retain a certain amount of healthy self-interest, romantic yearning, and concern for creature comforts, then ordinary people's interests in such goods cannot be ignored. This seems especially important if we accept—as both Mengzi and Dai apparently do—that we improve upon our moral judgments by thinking about what people would commonly affirm under idealized circumstances. For example, if we just stipulate that everyone in the ideal scenario is a moral saint, we would seem to be committed to moral norms that satisfy the interests of moral saints but not of normal people. If Mengzi were committed to making his common affirmability criterion more democratic, presumably he would adopt a strategy like Dai's. Does he? When the relevant passages are juxtaposed
p. 67 ↳ on this issue, I tend to see a kind of formal similarity but substantive disagreement (or ambiguity) between Mengzi and Dai. Formally, both Mengzi and Dai are fully committed to the idea that "I and the sage" (or *we* and the sage) are of the same kind, and it is supposed to follow from this that we have similar tastes, preferences, and sensibilities (*Mengzi* 6A7). However, looking at the specific similarities between sages and ordinary people, Dai is more consistent about insisting on those similarities than Mengzi. For example, Mengzi tends to present his sage figures as extraordinarily altruistic, such that they are capable of acts of tremendous self-sacrifice with no discernable regret (*Mengzi* 5A2, 6B4, 7A35, 7B6). In contrast, Dai is adamant that even the most virtuous people embody a kind of "humane love of one's self" (*rén qí shēn* 仁其身).[38]

For these reasons, Dai's use of common affirmability stands out in certain qualified but important ways. On the reading offered here, his moral epistemology is designed to take greater account of the interests and ethical judgments of ordinary people. The most important upshots for decision-makers are that they are required to check their personal opinions against the standard of common affirmability, required to adopt habits and methods of judgment that are grounded or informed by empathetic perspective taking, and are encouraged to take the objections and criticisms of others—including of ordinary people—as qualified reasons to doubt their own judgments. Furthermore, Dai takes steps to ensure that the ideal affirmers aren't so idealized as to neglect the basic desires and feelings of ordinary people, steps that aren't evident in the *Mengzi.* For those who insist on reading the *Mengzi* as laying down a warrant for more democratic epistemology than I propose, we can say at minimum that Dai is far more consistent about clarifying the relevant democratic norms, making it clear that good ethical decision-making must be fair to the feelings-based interests of the relevant parties, that ordinary people have reasonably reliable faculties of moral judgment, and that sagely knowers would affirm and advocate for the same basic interests as their more ordinary counterparts. In all of these respects, Dai is more deeply and systematically committed to democratic epistemic norms than Mengzi and stands apart from the tradition of Mengzi to this extent.

V. Conclusion

In the final analysis, my reading of Dai's common affirmability criterion takes him at his word, seeing it as necessary to explain how individual agents can find external traction in confirming and correcting their own moral judgments, and as a relatively demanding basis or standard to which we should hold all of our actionable moral judgments. I have agreed with the view of some of Dai's recent enthusiasts that his interest in common affirmability sets him apart from his tradition. However, what sets him apart is his systematic commitment to developing a more democratic moral epistemology, and not any attempt to develop a contractualist foundation for
p. 68 ethical or moral norms. This depiction of Dai is a hopeful one for Dai's longer-term prospects as a figure in the global ↳ history of philosophy, as a DAI Zhen who falls somewhere between being a mere echo of his Confucian forebears and a stumbling early proponent of modern metaethics is sure to have much more to say—more interesting and productive philosophical arguments and positions—than the more reductive readings of him would allow. There are good and worthy reasons for thinking that moral epistemology must be more democratic in the senses that matter to Dai—not just the reasons mentioned in this chapter, but also because it provides a basis for the reasonable hope that meaningful ethical gains are possible for human beings in general (*Evidential Commentary*, Sections 1, 13, 26; Tiwald 2016, 2023). These concerns are closer to the heart of Dai's philosophical enterprise and point the way to rich and still undeveloped areas of inquiry.[39]

Notes

1. Major intellectuals that fit this description include ZHĀNG Tàiyán 章太炎 (1869–1936), LIÁNG Qǐchāo 梁啟超 (1873–1929), and HÚ Shì 胡適 (1891–1962). See Qiu (2004), Cheng (2021), and Wu et al. (2015, vol. 1). HU Shi was a leading figure in the May Fourth Movement and among the scholars most interested in DAI Zhen's philosophy, being the first to publish a modern scholarly monograph on it (Hu 1996, first published in 1927).

2. Because Dai wrote polemics against the heavy-handed metaphysics of irreducible *li* 理 (pattern, principle), some scholars have described him as friendly to modern naturalism (Hu 1996 and Chong 2021). Because Dai aimed to clarify the Dao (Way) through evidentially rich methods, philological and historical study, some have characterized him as an empiricist or positivist (Wu et al. 2015). Because he defended self-interested desires and strenuously objected to ascetic or self-abnegationist tendencies in mainstream and popular ethics, some have sought to characterize him as a forerunner to present-day defenders of individual and human rights (Angle 2002: 93–98).

3. Some philosophers distinguish between ethics and morality, taking the latter to refer to some part of ethics that is concerned with obligation or rights and wrongs or universal rules or something else. Morality—whatever it is—is often said to be the characteristic enterprise of modern Western thinkers like Hobbes and Kant. At least one 21st-century interpreter of DAI Zhen takes him to be engaged in a similar enterprise and thus describes his ethical thought as adopting some of the characteristics of moral philosophy (Luo 2018). I myself think this might be true of some of the norms and procedures that he recommends for the part of his ethics that concerns human interactions, but it depends on difficult and contested issues that are too complicated to deal with here. For present purposes, we can think of this chapter as a study of Dai's ethics in the first instance. Sometimes I will use "moral" or its cognates because substituting "ethical" would be misleading—e.g., "ethical epistemology" seems to describe epistemology conducted ethically, and not the philosophy of ethical knowledge.

4. "Ordinary human feelings" is my imperfect translation of *rén zhī cháng qíng* 人之常情. A more precise but cumbersome translation might be "people's ordinary and constant genuine responses to situations."

5. *Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the* Mengzi (*Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證), Sections 2–6, 10, 13, and 21. Hereafter, the *Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the* Mengzi will be abbreviated as *Evidential Commentary.* Unless ↳ specified otherwise, citations of this text will refer to the edition and ordering of sections found in Dai (2009: 263–329).

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6. Lao (2021: 817–25); see especially 822.

7. Accordingly, I will follow Dai's lead and take *ran* as a putative and thus transitive verb as "to regard as being so," which is grammatically incompatible with reading it as a transitive verb as "to be so."

8. "The text refers to pattern (*li* 理) to highlight the mind's ability to make distinctions, and it refers to rightness (*yi* 義) to highlight the mind's ability to consider and decide a matter. After things have been clearly distinguished so that [we can see how] each has its unchangeable standard, the word for this is "well ordered" (*li* 理). If some particular thing is made to fit these [standards], the word for this is "right" (*yi*). Therefore, clearly understanding pattern is a matter of clearly understanding the relevant distinctions, and perfecting rightness is a matter of perfecting one's consideration and decision [about whether something fits with those distinctions]. If one doesn't clearly understand pattern, then one will often be confined to noticing dubious similarities, which gives rise to confusion and doubt. If one hasn't perfected righteousness, [one's consideration and decision] will often be mixed together with personal bias and harm the true way of the matter" (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 2; translation modified from my published translation in Tiwald and Van Norden 2014, 324).

9. Quoting from *Mengzi* 6A7.

10. *Evidential Commentary*, Section 4; my emphasis. This translation modified from my published translation in Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 324).

11. I follow Kwong-loi SHUN in thinking that Dai sometimes plays on two different senses of *qing*—as "feelings" and as "what's genuinely so" (Shun 2002: 221).

12. *Evidential Commentary*, Section 2; translation modified from my published translation in Tiwald and Van Norden

(2014: 322).

13. Ultimately, Lao thinks even this revised reading can't be right and admits that he doesn't know what Dai really meant by "what all heart-minds affirm in common." See Lao (2021: 822–23).

14. Notice that in cases like this, the evidential value of hearing the views of others is partly derivative of the evidential value of good empathetic perspective taking. It is in virtue of making me better able to empathize that the testimony of someone else gives me reasons to believe a moral judgment true or false. My thanks to Philip J. Ivanhoe for this point, which explains a deal of Confucian thinking about the use of *shu* to gain a personal understanding of historical figures and events (see Ivanhoe 2009: 193–201).

15. For example, see Dai's *Remnants of Words* (*Xuyan* 緒言) 1.10. All citations of *Remnants of Words* will refer to the edition and ordering of fascicles (*juan*) and sections found in Dai (2009: 351–406).

16. See Section 5 of Dai's *Evidential Commentary* on properly adjusting one's estimation of the fallibility of the wise (*zhìzhě* 智者) versus the masses (*zhòngrén* 眾人).

17. Roughly, by "Golden Rule" I mean a rule of behavior that one should do to others what one would want done to oneself, and by "Silver Rule" I mean a rule that one shouldn't do to others what one wouldn't want done to oneself. The Confucian canon offers various iterations of both sorts of rule, and Dai takes them to point to an indispensable requirement of good or sound moral judgment. See *Evidential Commentary*, Sections 2, 5, 11.

18. "嗚呼，其孰謂以此制事，以此治人之非理哉!" (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 5).

p. 70 19. *Evidential Commentary*, Sections 15, 21, and 41. See also Tiwald (2010).

20. 以我之情絜人之情，而無不得其平是也 (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 2; cf. Tiwald and Van Norden 2014: 322).

21. *Evidential Commentary*, Sections 1, 2, 30. See also Shun (2002: 221–22).

22. See Hoffman (2000: 159–64); Tiwald (2018a: 382–83).

23. We could be somewhat more specific and call this interpretation metaethical contractualism or metaethical constructivism. But for present purposes, I want to keep the intuitive link between common affirmation and the idea of an ideal contract or agreement between people and so will use "contractualist."

24. *Evidential Commentary*, Sections 1–6.

25. *Evidential Commentary*, Section 6; see also Section 13.

26. There is still another view in the neighborhood of contractualism, which grounds ethical norms in what we might call reasons-responsiveness or reasons-responsive autonomy—roughly, the ability of human beings to grasp moral reasons and be moved to act on them, sometimes against natural inclination or the like. The proposal that Dai grounds ethical norms in reasons-responsive autonomy is spelled out in great detail in an interesting and provocative book by LÚO Yǎchún 羅雅純, who suggests that Dai's metaethics shares important similarities to Christine Korsgaard's, especially the position developed by Korsgaard in *The Sources of Normativity* (Korsgaard 1996; see Luo 2018: 128–69). An earlier version of this chapter responded to this interpretation at length, but the discussion was too long and digressive. For now, it should suffice to note two reasons to doubt this reading of Dai. First, there is no indication in Dai's philosophical writings that people get their special moral status in virtue of being responsive to reasons. His view instead seems to be that humans care especially about other human beings because they belong to the same species, which is marked by ethical improvability and not by reasons-responsiveness. In fact, Dai thinks nonhuman animals are reasons-responsive to some extent. Second, there is no indication in Dai's writings that we are required by *rationality* (e.g., by the principle of noncontradiction or the like) to recognize the similar moral status of others. Dai instead invokes natural affinity for creatures that happen to resemble ourselves as the basis for this recognition (*Remnants of Words* 1.11–12; *Evidential Commentary*, Section 21). I am grateful to Brad Cokelet for ongoing discussions of DAI Zhen's metaethics, particularly in the process of coauthoring a paper on DAI Zhen and T. M. Scanlon, which we presented at the Rutgers Workshop on Chinese Philosophy at Rutgers University in April 2018.

27. That is, he wanted powerful people both to more regularly take account of the views and interests of ordinary people, and to treat those views and interests as good or weighty reasons in moral deliberation—e.g., reasons to believe a

moral view true or false, reasons to think that second thoughts are warranted, that more inquiry is needed, etc.

28. *Evidential Commentary*, Sections 4, 5, 10, 43, passim. See also Tiwald (2011).

29. "Of all of the works I have authored in my modest lifetime, the single most important is *An Evidential Commentary on the Meanings of Terms in the Mengzi*, for it contains the essentials for setting people's minds aright. Regardless of whether they are correct or perverse, our contemporaries mistakenly dub their personal opinions [expressions of] Pattern, and so inflict great harm on the people [*min*]. Thus I had no choice but to write my *Evidential Commentary*" ("Letter to DUAN Yucai [2]," in Hu 1996: 366).

30. Cheng (2000: 225–33); Ivanhoe (2016: 49–50); Qiu (2004: 67–68); Hu (2015: 110–19).

p. 71 31. For example, see *Evidential Commentary*, Sections 5–8 and 20. Evidence that Dai's interest in this theme arose early can be found in *On the Good* (*Yuánshàn* 原善) 2.4 and 3.1 (in Dai 2009: 330–50), and *Notes on Mengzi, Treating Him as My Personal Teacher* (*Mèngzǐ sī shū lù* 孟子私淑錄) 2.3–2.4 (in Dai 2009: 407–42). The expression "the sages and I are of the same kind" comes from *Mengzi* 6A7.

32. *Evidential Commentary*, Section 13. See also *Remnants of Words* 1.10.

33. *Evidential Commentary*, Section 21; see also *Remnants of Words* 1.16 and *Notes on Mengzi, Treating Him as My Personal Teacher* 2.5. For a reconstruction of Dai's defense of self-interested desires, see Tiwald (2011, 2020).

34. "心之所同然者何也？謂理也，義也" (*Mengzi* 6A7).

35. "心之所同然始謂之理" (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 4, my emphasis. For the longer passage, see the one labeled *Affirm in Common* in Section II of this chapter). I owe this point about Dai's conditionalizing use of *shi* 始 ("only if … then … ") to a conversation with ZHÈNG Zémián 鄭澤綿 (and see Zheng 2015: 447–48).

36. To be sure, I read the *Mengzi* as recommending that ordinary people be consulted about some issues, particular where the ruler needs reliable information about their quality of life or their on-the-ground perspective of a particular person's behavior or character (Tiwald 2008). This is a far cry from saying that all moral judgments should be made more sound by checking for common affirmability.

37. "What [the knowing heart-mind] takes delight in must be what it fully affirms" (其悅者，必其至是者也—more literally, "what it fully regards as right" or "what it fully regards as a true instantiation [of good order and rightness]") (*Evidential Commentary*, Section 6).

38. *Evidential Commentary*, Section 21; see also *Remnants of Words* 1.16 and *Notes on Mengzi, Treating Him as My Personal Teacher* 2.5. For a reconstruction of Dai's defense of self-interested desires, see Tiwald (2011, 2020).

39. My thanks to Stephen Angle, Yun-chak ("Frank") CHONG 莊潤澤, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Harvey Lederman, Jeremy Reid, and an anonymous reviewer for astute and helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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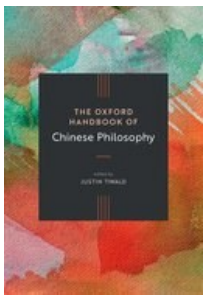

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CHAPTER

5 Well-Being in Early Chinese Philosophy

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Abstract

This chapter offers an overview of the accounts of well-being found in three central classical Chinese traditions in early China: Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism. It identifies the fundamental prudential goods that lie at the core of each tradition's account of well-being such as family, virtue, equanimity, social order, and free wandering. The chapter seeks to illuminate why classical Chinese thinkers believed that these goods were important for a flourishing human life and what contemporary lessons can be drawn from them.

Keywords: well-being, welfare, Chinese philosophy, Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
Series: Oxford Handbooks
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I. Introduction

While philosophical investigations of classical Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world have blossomed in recent years, there are few sustained treatments of well-being in early Chinese texts.[1] This is likely due, in part, to the lack of explicit discussions about well-being in the writings of classical Chinese thinkers. Nevertheless, we can draw out and reconstruct the core accounts of well-being in a number of significant Chinese philosophical traditions. This chapter provides a basic outline of the different accounts of well-being we find in three central philosophical traditions in early China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism.[2] Each tradition, with its own distinctive vision of human flourishing, provides fertile ground for the exploration of a variety of ideas about the nature and sources of well-being. Due to the enormous complexities of each tradition, I will only offer a broad overview of each account of well-being, focusing on the early parts of each tradition, drawing selectively on certain representative thinkers and texts, and concentrating on a limited range of prudential goods that I believe will be of greatest interest to contemporary philosophers.

Section II examines the concept of well-being by drawing on some recent contemporary discussions. Sections III–V provide outlines of the basic accounts of well-being that we find in early Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism. Section VI concludes with reflections

on some constructive ideas we can draw from these moral traditions for contemporary work on well-being.

II. Concept of Well-Being

While there are debates about what exactly the concept of well-being refers to, there are some basic characterizations that are widely
p. 78 accepted among contemporary ↳ philosophers. One basic construal is that well-being is what is noninstrumentally, basically, or fundamentally good for a subject. A variety of cognate notions are identified to help clarify the concept of well-being such as "welfare," "benefit," "self-interest," "personal good," "flourishing," and "happy life." Stephen Campbell comments, "Your well-being is a matter of *how well you are doing, how well things are going for you,* or *how well your life is going for you.*"[3] Stephen Darwall offers a rational care theory of welfare, which states that "[welfare] is a concept of what we would rationally desire for someone insofar as we care for her."[4]

Well-being, as these descriptions indicate, is a normative concept; considerations of well-being offer reasons in favor of thinking, feeling, and acting in certain ways. Given this characterization, the concept of well-being should be distinguished from what is often labeled "psychological happiness," which designates a purely descriptive, positive psychological state.[5] Most agree that well-being and psychological happiness bear a close relationship, and in the discussions in this chapter I will also devote some space to the prudential psychology of classical Chinese thinkers.[6] But it is noteworthy that among contemporary philosophers there is considerable debate about whether well-being is "objective" or "subjective."[7] While there are different ways to draw this distinction, the following characterization will suffice for our purposes. If an objectivist account of well-being is true, then there are certain facts about an individual's well-being that are not wholly dependent on that individual's attitudes. For example, you might think loving relationships are a fundamental constituent of well-being and thus think that someone who doesn't have any positive attitudes, for example, a desire for loving relationships, is worse off for not having them. If a subjectivist account of well-being is true, then what constitutes an individual's well-being is wholly determined by one's attitudes. As I will address later, the early Chinese thinkers generally espouse a form of objectivism about well-being.

Because human well-being is about what makes a particular person's life go well for her—what contemporary scholars often dub "subject-relativity"—contemporary philosophical literature on well-being has primarily focused on developing theories of well-being that explain what constitutes an individual's well-being at a time or across time. But many classical philosophical traditions in China, especially Confucianism and Mohism, take a keener interest in how families, communities, and societies influence and shape our lives. They pay greater attention to what we might call *human prudential ecology*: the environmental conditions that best promote well-being.[8] At least for the Confucians and Mohists, the assumption seems to be that because of our social natures we cannot understand what constitutes human well-being without inquiring into what makes for flourishing families and societies. Even the Daoists, who tend to take a skeptical view of social and political organizations and structures, at least identify a variety of harms rendered by defective social conditions and see well-being as essentially involving a proper connection to the natural environment. In the final section of this chapter, I will return to a discussion of how the standard views of subject-relativity are challenged by classical Chinese thinkers.

p. 79 Some philosophers, such as Daniel Haybron, have also distinguished well-being from a broader normative concept sometimes labeled "the good life." The good life is a broad category that refers to the most choiceworthy life as a whole, which includes other values or goods as components such as virtue or beauty. While this is a legitimate conceptual distinction, it's not a distinction that we find among classical Chinese thinkers. One reason might be that many philosophers in the classical Chinese traditions take virtue or moral goodness as a basic (sometimes the most important) element or constituent of well-being. At the substantive level, there seems to be little difference between the good life and well-being on the classical Chinese view, and for this reason I will use the terms interchangeably.

It is significant that no single classical Chinese character closely corresponds to the notion of well-being. Here the concept of *lì* 利, usually translated as "profit" or "benefit" might seem closest, but this can be misleading since *li* often refers to a narrow set of material or external goods, rather than well-being in the sense that is employed by contemporary philosophers. Of course, *li* (in the narrow sense) might be an important part of well-being, as on the Mohist account. But at least on the Confucian and Daoist accounts,

it looks like there are other prudential goods besides *li* (in narrow sense) such as ritual activity, the realization of beauty, and filial practice, which are more central to well-being.

On the other hand, *li* is sometimes employed in a broader sense that corresponds more closely to the concept of well-being. When *li* is employed in this sense, it tends not to carry the kind of negative connotation when it is coupled with notions like "petty" (*xiǎo* 小), "private," or "egoistic" (*sī* 私) or when it is sharply contrasted with ethical virtues such as "righteousness" (*yì* 義) by Mengzi or Xunzi.[9] We find an early positive statement about *li* in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü* (*Lushi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), a significant classical Chinese text from the fifth century BCE later designated as one of the five Confucian classics (*wujing* 五經): "Therefore the sage's attitude toward sounds, colors and flavors is that if they are beneficial (*li* 利) to his nature he chooses them, and if they are harmful to his nature he discards them."[10] And while Mencius employs the narrow sense of *li* and is usually critical of it, Xunzi sometimes casts *li* in a more favorable light and seems to have in mind something closer to the concept of well-being:

> He comes to the point where he loves it [virtue or goodness], and then his eyes love it more than the five colors, his ears love it more than the five tones, his mouth loves it more than the five flavors, and his heart considers it more *profitable* (*li* 利) than possessing the whole world. For this reason, power and *profit* (*li* 利) cannot sway him, the masses cannot shift him, and nothing in the world can shake him.[11]

Xunzi here shifts between two senses of *li*. By allowing the thought that virtues are more *li* 利 than the whole world, Xunzi takes up a broader (virtue-infused) notion of *li* than *li* as a set of material or external advantages, the sense attached to the second use of *li* in the passage.

p. 80 The clearest discussion of the distinction between two different senses of *li* among early Chinese thinkers is found in Wang Chong 王充 (27–100 CE), a lesser-known but highly productive and original scholar from the Eastern Han dynasty:

> Now, there are two kinds of *li*: there is the *li* of material goods and there is the *li* of well-being. When King Hui asked: "How to *li* my state?" how did Mencius know that the king did not mean the *li* of well-being? But Mencius hastily criticized the king for taking it as material *li.*[12]

The classical Chinese characters for what Carine Defoort translates as "well-being" are "*ān jí* 安吉," which can be translated as peace, comfort, or good fortune. More can be said here, but at the least "well-being" seems to be a good approximation for this notion. What Wang Chong points out is that *li* carries multiple senses in classical writings so we can only interpret *li* as well-being in specific contexts. This issue will come up again in our discussion of Mozi, who relies heavily on the notion of *li.*

Might the concept of the *dào* 道, usually translated as "the Way," be closer to the concept of well-being? The notion of *dao* is a central, normative concept in early Chinese traditions, providing the normative standard for regulating individual lives and political structures. Some scholars have noted a tight connection between the *dao* and well-being. Philip Ivanhoe comments, "[Kongzi and Zhuangzi] are quite clear about the source and nature of happiness: happiness lies in following the 'Way' (*dao*), and a life lived in harmony with the Dao or Way results in a range of special and highly valued goods."[13] Jiyuan YU draws a close link between the *dao* and *eudaimonia*: by following the *dao* one achieves *eudaimonia*, which he glosses as "well-being" or "flourishing." While the *dao* and well-being are distinct concepts, there seems to be a deep conceptual tie: following the *dao* leads to the prudentially best life. By examining what sort of life best follows the *dao* in different Chinese traditions, we can gain some understanding of their views about well-being.

III. Confucian Well-Being

While we do not find explicit, focused treatments of well-being within classical Confucian texts, spread throughout the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, and *Xunzi,* we find discussions of the kind of lives people should strive for and nuanced explorations of various positive emotional states that are central to the virtuous or sagely life such as joy (*lè* 樂) and security or comfort (*ān* 安). While there are some substantive differences and disagreements among these three works, overall they provide a fairly unified picture of human flourishing centering on certain basic Confucian goods such as ritual, music, family, community, and virtue.[14] On the early Confucian view, these various goods mutually support each other in a causally interconnected network.[15] For example, certain foundational virtues are affirmed as taking root in the family, and these virtues help ↳ build and strengthen familial ties; in turn, flourishing families provide a nurturing environment for moral development.[16]

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Because the Confucians advocate certain practices and virtues as objectively good (since they are prescribed by the *dao*), they are best interpreted as endorsing some form of objectivism about well-being. On the other hand, one remarkable feature of early Confucian thinkers is their keen awareness of how emotion and motivation are central to the process of moral development, and how the virtues are accompanied by a stable form of joy that bears a strong connection to psychological happiness. Drawing on some recent scholarly discussions, I will discuss how the virtues on the Confucian picture are connected to psychological happiness, especially through an exploration of the kind of equanimity that the Confucians take as constitutive of a life of virtue.

Although scholarly disagreements remain about whether Confucianism is best interpreted as espousing a form of virtue ethics, most scholars agree that the cultivation of good character traits was a foundational concern for the early Confucians. By developing and exercising virtues such as benevolence (*rén* 仁), filial piety (*xiào* 孝), righteousness (*yì* 義), and ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮), human beings realize a life that accords with the *dao*. While the early Confucians emphasize how these virtues motivate and influence human action, they are also deeply concerned with how they shape human emotions, the quality of personal relationships, and the interior lives of people pursuing the life of virtue. One of the primary changes wrought by the development of virtues lies in one's evaluative judgments about the proper ordering of goods:

> The master said, "Eating coarse rice and drinking water, leaning upon my bent arm for a pillow—there is joy to be found in such things! Wealth and honor acquired in immoral ways are like floating clouds to me!"[17] (*Analects* 7.15)

A common theme we find in early Confucian discussions is a distinction between higher-level and lower-level goods, and more generally between matters of triviality and matters of importance. Mengzi, for example, elaborates on the hierarchy of goods: "If one's finger is not as good as other people's one knows to dislike it. But if one's heart is not as good as other people's, one does not know to dislike it. This is what is called not appreciating the categories of importance."[18] For Mengzi the cultivation of the virtues through the development and exercise of certain moral inclinations or "sprouts" (*duān* 端) outweigh in importance any material or external goods. But to fully grasp these "categories of importance" and implement them in one's practical life one must gain a proper perspective. Consider again a passage from the *Xunzi* cited earlier:

> He comes to the point where he loves it [virtue or goodness], and then his eyes love it more than the five colors, his ears love it more than the five tones, his mouth loves it more than the five flavors, and his heart considers it more profitable than possessing the whole world. For this reason, power and profit cannot sway him, the masses cannot shift him, and nothing in the world can shake him.[19]

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Both Mengzi and Xunzi take the development of the virtues as reconfiguring one's desires and values in deep and systematic ways so that virtuous living becomes their dominant end. And given the plausible assumption that well-being bears a connection to one's deepest desires and values, the process of becoming virtuous also transforms one's understanding of what well-being consists in.

An enduring psychological change accompanies growth in virtue. A sustained joy takes root in the virtuous person, buffering them from harsh external conditions as well as negative social experiences such as personal slights or malicious gossip. Commenting on his most virtuous disciple, YAN Hui, Confucius remarks, "What a worthy person YAN Hui is! With a basket of food, a bucket of water, living in a poor street. Other people become distressed, but it has no effect on YAN Hui's joy. What a worthy person YAN Hui is!"[20] Mengzi also sees an enduring and active form of joy in the life of virtue:

> If one delights in them [the virtues] then they grow. If they grow, then how can they be stopped? If they cannot be stopped, the one does not notice one's feet dancing to them, one's hands swaying to them.[21]

Elaborating on the psychological state of the virtuous, Xunzi states,

> For the perfected person, what forcing oneself, what steeling oneself, what precariousness is there? Thus, those who are murky understand only external manifestations, but those who are clear understand internal manifestations. The sage follows his desires and embraces all his dispositions, and the things dependent on these simply turn out well-ordered. What forcing oneself, what steeling oneself, what precariousness is there? Thus, the person of *ren* carries out the Way without striving, and the sage carries out the Way without forcing himself. The person of *ren* ponders it without reverence, and the sage ponders it with joy. This is the proper way to order one's heart.[22]

Although the form of equanimity that is essential to Confucian well-being holds steadfast even in the midst of external misfortunes (e.g., ill-health, material poverty), it is contingent on a host of other important conditions that are central to the ideal Confucian life such as wholehearted commitment to following the *dao*, music, ritual practice, and life in the family. Not even the sage or the virtuous could simply ignore the central Confucian practices and maintain the equanimity that otherwise is invulnerable to severe external circumstances, as shown in Confucius's remarks. In this way the early Confucians endorse what I call *conditional equanimity*: the view that equanimity, although a generally stable and enduring disposition, must be developed and sustained by a specific set of (Confucian) practices conjoined with a wholehearted commitment to the *dao*.[23] It is also worth noting that the equanimity here does not imply that there are no occasions for sorrow or grief even for the virtuous agent. After all, we have Confucius mourning excessively for his beloved disciple YAN Hui after his untimely death, and funeral rituals are meant to be
p. 83 accompanied by genuine sorrow. Kwong-loi ↳ SHUN describes Confucian equanimity as "reflective equanimity," which refers to a calm mental state of the virtuous person that arises from a complete orientation and commitment toward living virtuously.[24] As Shun notes, this does not mean the virtuous person does not experience times of frustration or sadness, but because virtuous living takes top priority, as long as she acts in accordance with the *dao*, there is an unyielding form of equanimity that is sustained as long as one remains on the proper path.

The central explanation why the early Confucians endorse conditional equanimity comes in two parts. First, the Confucians accepted that not even the truly virtuous were exempt from certain basic emotional needs. Second, there are specific ways to satisfy emotional needs, for example, by finding joy in ritual ceremonies or expressing grief through burial practices. Consider Mengzi's explanation of choosing a more expensive coffin for his mother's burial:

> Mengzi said, "In high antiquity, inner and outer coffins had no standard measure. But in middle antiquity, inner coffins were seven inches, and outer coffins matched them, for everyone from the Son of Heaven on down to commoners. This was not just for the beauty of their appearance, but because in this manner people's hearts were fathomed. They would not be pleased if they could not get such coffins. They would not be pleased if they did not have such materials. If they could get such coffins because they had such materials, the ancients would all use them. Why should I alone not be like this? Furthermore, does it not make the hearts of people happy to prevent the earth from touching the flesh of those who are transforming? I have heard that a gentleman will not, for the world, economize in regard to his parents.[25]

Not even Mengzi (or any sage for that matter) can ignore proper burial practices because of certain fundamental psychological needs, in this case, the need to honor one's parents. In the following passage Xunzi illustrates a similar point drawing on the human need for music:

> Music is joy. It is an unavoidable part of the emotional disposition of human beings. Thus, people cannot be without music. If they feel joy, they must express it in sound and give it shape in movement. The way of human beings is such that changes in the motions of their nature are completely contained in these sounds and movements. So, people cannot be without joy, and their joy cannot be without shape, but if it takes shape and does not accord with the Way, then there will inevitably be chaos.[26]

The virtuous person's equanimity is not invulnerable: not even the sage's happiness is undisturbed by the inability to bury one's parents or the loss of all musical experiences. Nevertheless, when it comes to external goods like wealth or honor, the virtuous can thrive in their absence.

The Confucian life of virtue is marked by a host of positive emotions and stable joy. But as noted earlier, there can be occasions in
p. 84 which the virtuous person experiences negative emotions such as grief or frustration.[27] Sometimes, acting according to virtue ↳ in tough situations will require giving up substantial material goods, possibly even one's own life:

> Life is something I desire; righteousness is also something I desire. If I cannot have both, I will forsake life and select righteousness. Life is something I desire, but there is something I desire more than life. Hence, I will not do just anything to obtain it.[28]

IV. Mohist Well-Being

Mozi was the first consequentialist in the history of philosophy. Like the classical utilitarians Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, he was also driven by a quest for social change to maximize good consequences. Because he appealed to the notion of benefit (*li* 利) as the ultimate standard for right policy and action, well-being seems to play a critical role in his normative system. On the other hand, as suggested earlier, there are multiple senses of *li*, so we cannot take it for granted that Mozi's account of *li* should be assumed to be an account of well-being. In fact, as we'll see, *li* is sometimes used by Mozi to refer to what is only instrumentally good, rather than what fundamentally or basically constitutes well-being. Next, I will outline an account of well-being drawn from the Mohist texts.

It is worth noting that reconstructing Mozi's account of well-being is challenging because his attention is directed toward the good of society as a whole, rather than the well-being of individuals. According to Chris Fraser, "The benefits they have in mind are primarily benefits of the community as a whole—security, stability, and harmonious relationships, along with sufficient food and clothing for all."[29] Because of this communitarian or collectivist orientation as well as his preoccupation with benevolence and righteousness, "Mohist ethics tend to make individuals vanish as particular persons into their collective welfare."[30] For these reasons, Fraser draws the implication that the Mohists have little to say about what constitutes individual well-being because the life they advocate focuses on maximizing the best consequences for society as a whole.

But we can still draw a distinction between Mozi's consequentialist normative theory, which concerns what makes an action or practice right, and his views about well-being. Contemporary discussions of the *Mozi* has tended to focus on the concept of *jiān ài* 兼愛, variously translated as "universal love," "inclusive care," and "impartial caring," and the nature and content of our obligation to care about the welfare of all.[31] While Mozi was primarily focused on the common good, I propose that if we carefully consider the three kinds of benefit highlighted by Mozi we can reconstruct an account of individual well-being that is implicitly held by Mozi. Even though these benefits are understood by Mozi as what conduces to the collective good of all people, it seems plausible to assume that these benefits bear a strong connection to the good of individuals.

Before I turn to the three kinds of benefits, a case could be made that a more direct way of getting at what well-being consists in for
p. 85 Mozi might be through an examination ↳ of what Mozi presents as the rewards and punishments of Heaven in the *Tianzhi* 天志 chapter.[32] There Mozi comments on how Heaven rewarded the sage-kings who carried out Heaven's will:

> And so Heaven made it come to pass that they [the sage-kings] each became the Son of Heaven and were given the wealth of all the world. Their descendants have continued for a myriad of generations, their goodness has been proclaimed throughout succeeding generations and spread throughout the world. They are praised down to the present day and are known as "sage-kings."[33]

On the other hand, the vicious kings were punished in the following way:

> And so Heaven made it come to pass that they did not finish out their natural span of life and their line did not even span a single full generation. They are reviled down to the present day and are known as "vicious kings."[34]

Wealth, a normal span of life, a long line of descendants, and being honored are all taken as good for us. But since these prudential goods, perhaps with the exception of being honored, are closely tied to the three kinds of primary benefits, the following discussion concerning the primary benefits should also help us understand the passages about Heaven's rewards and punishments. Moreover, I think the benefit of social order highlights a distinct prudential good that is worth examining in its own right, which is not present in these passages.

Mozi identifies three kinds of benefits: (a) wealth (*fù* 富), (b) population (*zhòng* 眾), and (c) social order (*zhì* 治). But there is an ambiguity in Mozi's discussions of these benefits: is Mozi talking about merely instrumental good or noninstrumental (or intrinsic) good? This is not always clear from the text, but I think we can help clarify Mozi's view by applying this distinction. For example, while wealth is one of the three central benefits, it seems clear that wealth is only an instrumental benefit: its prudential value depends on the realization of other intrinsic prudential goods.[35]

It is understandable why Mozi would have portrayed wealth as a basic good since he lived during a time of widespread destitution, emphasizing the need to "feed the hungry, rest the weary, and support the myriad people" (*Mozi* 27/19). Sufficient wealth would help support the elderly, widows, and orphans, as well as those suffering from plague or a failed harvest. But imagine we asked Mozi, "What good does wealth provide?" The answer probably wouldn't be "it's just good in itself!" but something along the lines of "they help sustain lives, prevent ill health, and decrease suffering." Wealth, that is, has an instrumental connection to other more basic prudential goods such as life and health.

A similar point seems to apply to the benefit of increasing population. In fact, although Chris Fraser refers to the three kinds of benefits as "basic prudential goods," he remarks,

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> In the Mohists' time, a substantial head count was crucial to the economic prospects of families and the economic and military strengths of states. A bigger family ↳ increased the household labor supply and ensured the elderly would have relatives to support them; a larger population helped increase tax revenue and ensured a more formidable defense force. The Mohists' concern is not with population for its own sake but with increasing the population when insufficient.[36]

This is a helpful point that explains why Mozi thought population growth was a significant benefit; it is closely tied to a number of other basic prudential goods. Bryan Van Norden also makes a similar remark that taking population growth as intrinsically valuable is highly implausible: "The Mohists have an implausible position if they hold that populousness is intrinsically valuable. The situation in present-day China or India illustrates that populousness is valuable only up to a point."[37] Van Norden goes on to give a possible explanation that, like the neo-Mohists, the early Mohists may have conceived of benefit as "what one is pleased to get," thereby anchoring the value of populousness in pleasure.

For the first two types of benefit—material goods and populousness—the more plausible interpretation seems to be that they are both prudentially important but only because of their instrumental value. One possible reading is that the value of populousness is derived from its instrumental connection to material goods, and material goods bottom out in other more fundamental goods such as life and health.

What about the third benefit of social order? The answer will hinge on what exactly social order is according to the Mohists. Consider the following passage in which Mozi describes a "state of nature" afflicted with widespread chaos:

> within families, there was resentment and hatred between fathers and sons and elder and younger brothers that caused them to separate and disperse and made it impossible for them to cooperate harmoniously with one another. Throughout the world, people used water, fire, and poison to harm and injure one another, to the point where if they had strength to spare, they would not use it to help each other, if they had excess goods, they would leave them to rot away rather than distribute them to one another, and if they had helpful teachings, they would hide them away rather than teach them to one another. The chaos that ruled in the world was like what one finds among the birds and beasts.[38]

By taking the opposite of each element of disorder we can identify several elements of social order: (a) peace and mutual affection among family members, (b) public security (lack of injury to others), and (c) mutual aid through the sharing of excess goods and useful teachings. In other places Mozi also identifies worthy, capable and benevolent leaders as another significant element of social order.

We can see why social order carries important instrumental value since any family or community that is marked by resentment and ill will is susceptible to various harms and impeded from obtaining a wide array of goods such as stable institutions and mutual trust. It also seems quite plausible to regard healthy families and communities embodying mutual affection as basic prudential goods,
p. 87 although there is a lack of detailed discussions in Mozi's text concerning emotions and human psychology more ↳ generally. But what lies at the heart of the benefit of social order really seems to be the flourishing of social relationships, which many philosophers and social psychologists (and people in general) accept as a basic element of well-being.

Two core criticisms have been leveled at Mozi by contemporary scholars: (a) his overly narrow conception of human well-being, and (b) his lack of attention to human psychology. While both complaints are not groundless, further work may help mitigate their force. For example, with regard to the first criticism, while there are certain goods that are indeed lacking in Mohist discussions such as aesthetic value, a fundamental role that social relationships play for Mozi makes his view of well-being considerably more plausible.[39] Moreover, while moral psychology does not play a significant role for Mozi, his recognition of how resentment destroys relationships, and the human need for mutual affection and respect, suggests that he very well would have acknowledged certain positive emotions as necessary for good, well-ordered relationships.

As stated earlier, while I have endeavored to reconstruct an account of well-being for Mozi, individual well-being was not a central concern for Mozi. He was more interested in the flourishing of the state, and especially in helping the least advantaged of society. Because Mozi accepts a consequentialist normative theory, which takes the maximization of best consequences for all as the standard of right action, it may be difficult for Mozi to make room for individual well-being within his broader ethical system. For it seems that while well-being might be a happy byproduct arising from my pursuit of the good of all, my well-being *in itself* doesn't carry much normative weight. But most philosophers would agree that considerations of one's own well-being carries special normative significance, and a plausible ethical theory needs to address this fact.[40] What Mozi seemed to have believed was that impartial care for all and promoting the good of the poor and powerless would provide the best conditions for individual well-being.

Mozi had a remarkably keen awareness of the plight of the socially and economically disadvantaged, drawing attention to the need to create a widespread culture in which human beings are deeply concerned about the well-being of everyone:

> If one takes impartiality as the correct standard and truly seeks to promote and procure what is beneficial to the world, then those with sharp ears and keen eyes will listen and look out for others. Those with stout legs and strong arms will work for others, and those who understand the Way will educate and instruct others. And so men who reach old age without finding a wife and having children will get the support they need to live out their years. Young and helpless orphans, who are without father and mother, will find the support they need in order to reach maturity. Now such benefits can be attained only if impartiality is taken as the correct standard. And so I don't see what reason any person in the world who has heard about impartiality can give for condemning it.[41]

While many would agree that a society that cares for widows, orphans, as well as the physically, socially, and intellectually disadvantaged might be a more just, perhaps *morally* better society, when it comes to asking whether such a society is generally
p. 88 better ↳ for the well-being of individuals who occupy such a society, one might think the answer is less clear. Why would it be that *my* well-being, as a healthy, materially rich adult, improves by taking care of those who are least advantaged? Consider the following passage:

> Our teacher Mozi says, "Let us consider the case of a filial son who seeks what is beneficial for his parents. Does a filial son who seeks what is beneficial for his parents want other people to care for and benefit his parents or does he want other people to dislike and steal from his parents? According to the very meaning of filial piety, he must want other people to care for and benefit his parents. Given this, how should one act in order to bring about such a state of affairs? … Clearly one must first care for and benefit the parents of others in order to expect that they in turn will respond by

> caring for and benefitting one's own parents. And so for such mutually filial sons to realize unlimited good results, must they not first care for and benefit other people's parents?
>
> Let us consider what is said in the writings of the former kings. In the *Elegies* it says,
>
> There are no words that are left unanswered,
>
> No virtue that is left without a response.
>
> If you toss me a peach,
>
> I respond with a plum.
>
> According to these lines, anyone who cares for others will receive care from them while anyone who dislikes others will in turn be disliked.[42]

The core idea here is that we will not receive beneficial treatment unless we also exhibit the same kind of care toward others that we seek from them. Expanding on this idea, the following line of reasoning might be deployed to defend Mozi's justification of caring for the poor and vulnerable.

Every human being is vulnerable to a variety of possible injuries that can result in the need for constant care by others. All of us, at different times, are in fact dependent on the care of others. This is certainly true when we are very young, but it is also true during times of illness and old age. Moreover, there is always the possibility of debilitating illnesses or tragedies that can cripple us materially, physically, and spiritually. A culture in which inclusive care is practiced would ensure that we would also be taken care of in times of need. And since all human beings require the assistance and care of others at various times, a society embodying inclusive care will provide the best conditions for the attainment of individual well-being.[43]

This argument needs tightening and relies on several empirical assumptions. But it highlights how the broader culture and societal values—especially the treatment of the most vulnerable—may be more relevant for our own well-being than it might seem. Like the Confucians, the Mohists are deeply concerned about long-term consequences of certain attitudes and dispositions, although they have much less to say about how we can cultivate these states.

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V. Daoist Well-Being

The two central classical Daoist texts, the *Daodejing* 道德經 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, present unique challenges for extracting clearly defined philosophical positions. Poetic metaphors and humorous parables abound, and much of the texts, as a number of scholars have argued, seems directed toward philosophical therapy—stimulating some practical change in the reader—rather than the production of arguments or clarification of doctrines.[44] Nevertheless, there are certain core philosophical ideas that run through both works, such as deep skepticism about dominant cultural values, and the need to adopt a flexible mindset to successfully maneuver through life. The texts repeatedly draw attention to how certain beliefs and values hamper our ability to flourish and how an ability to shift perspectives enables one to live according to the *dao.*

The deep skepticism about values in Daoist thought are also sharply directed at both Confucianism and Mohism. From the Daoist perspective both the endorsement of specific prudential goods by Confucians and Mohists (such as ritual, filial piety, or wealth) and the level of confidence they possess about knowing what constitutes our well-being are unwarranted.[45]

Of the two classical texts the *Daodejing* focuses more on social and political reform while the *Zhuangzi* aims to identify the forms of dispositions, attitudes, and perspectives conducive to human flourishing.[46] The *Zhuangzi* is often taken as carrying a more philosophical orientation, and since what follows is meant to capture the basic philosophical features of the Daoist account of well-being, I will focus on this text to articulate what I see as the substantive vision of human flourishing that lies within the Daoist tradition.[47]

At a formal level, Zhuangzi's account of well-being consists in a life of fitting with the "natural patterns" (*tiān lǐ* 天理)—the deep structure and patterns fixed by the *dao.* Paul Kjellberg describes the natural patterns or "nature" as "the way that things really … [inherently] are as opposed to the ways people think of them as being."[48] What such a life looks like, Zhuangzi emphasizes, varies across individuals. Some have taken Zhuangzi's endorsement of the variability of what constitutes the good of individuals and his skepticism about values to imply a radical form of value relativism.[49] On the other hand, there is textual evidence that while what it is to live according to the *dao* varies across individuals, there are some attitudes and forms of life that better accord with the *dao*. In a variety of passages Zhuangzi turns a critical eye toward certain patterns of thought and action:

> Sweating and laboring to the end of his days and never seeing his accomplishments, utterly exhausting himself and never knowing where to look for rest—can you help pitying him? I'm not dead yet! he says, but what good is that? His body decays, his mind follows it—can you deny that this is a great sorrow? Man's life has always been a muddle like this.[50]

p. 90 After two millennia, these remarks remain highly relevant in the modern age; even with the rise of great material prosperity and extraordinary achievements in technology, human beings remain tethered to continuous labor, stress, and anxiety. As Philip Ivanhoe points out,

> Zhuangzi believed there are ways of living that are contrary to the way the world is: that is, which violate our nature and set us against the natural patterns and processes to be found in the world. Moreover, he further believed that there are ways of acting that enable us to accord with the nature of both ourselves as creatures—things among things in Nature's vast panorama—and Heaven's patterns and processes.[51]

What are the core elements of the good life for Zhuangzi? Recent scholarship tends to focus on two elements: (1) "nonaction" or "effortless action" (*wú wéi* 無為) and (2) free and easy wandering (*xiāo yáo yóu* 逍遙遊). There is also a third element that plays a critical instrumental role in realizing both these constitutive elements of well-being, which I will call "perspectival flexibility." I will first discuss perspectival flexibility and then turn to the two core elements of well-being we find in Zhuangzi.

i. Perspectival Flexibility

Zhuangzi notes a human tendency to become locked into certain patterns of judgments and attitudes, cutting us off from flexibly employing different perspectives providing us with creative solutions to practical problems. Zhuangzi persistently draws attention to numerous contexts in which human beings are confronted with a challenge, such as our own mortality or the death of those we love, and proposes that by shifting perspective we can manage them more effectively. In several passages, Zhuangzi illustrates the significance of our ability to shift viewpoints for harmonizing with the world:

> When the monkey trainer was handing out acorns, he said, "You get three in the morning and four at night." This made all the monkeys furious. "Well, then," he said, "you get four in the morning and three at night." The monkeys were all delighted. There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger. Let them, if they want to. So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer. This is called walking two roads.[52]

From the trainer's perspective the change in distributing acorns is inconsequential, but for the monkeys it is significant. Rather than responding with frustration, the wise trainer takes into account the preferences of the monkeys and adjusts accordingly. The ability to take different vantage points allows one to find imaginative ways of coordinating with others in a world filled with friction and contestation.

p. 91 One crucial standpoint scholars have tended to focus on is what Philip Ivanhoe and Justin Tiwald label as the "heavenly perspective," which views the world and human affairs from a panoramic, detached, and timeless point of view.[53] From this vantage point, human toil and preoccupation with daily affairs look petty and laughably trivial. Cultivating the ability to shift to the heavenly perspective counteracts against our tendency toward obsessing over personal human successes and failures and provides the resources to find psychological stability in our lives.

While the ability to shift to the heavenly perspective provides an important tool for handling a variety of situations and maintaining balance in one's life, Zhuangzi does not discount the importance of living in the world and excelling in everyday tasks. In fact, the exemplars of human flourishing explored by Zhuangzi are those that have perfected their crafts, such as butchering, bell making, and woodcarving. In these stories of highly skilled laborers we see Zhuangzi recognizing the need to carry out human affairs and to engage in the ordinary business of human life. Consider the story of the death of Zhuangzi's wife, in which Zhuangzi admits to grieving for her but then finds a way to detach and see her death as simply a part of the inevitable process of change.[54] The heavenly perspective does not commit Zhuangzi to denying the importance of experiencing basic human emotions like sorrow, but it allows him to reinterpret the meaning of his wife's death in a way that allows him to move forward.

ii. Nonaction

Nonaction (*wu wei*) is one of the most powerful and appealing features of Zhuangzi's vision of well-being. It is a mode or style of unselfconsciously carrying out activities with excellence and attention, marked by a deep sense of satisfaction and enjoyment. Cases of nonaction have been well documented by psychologists, characterized as activities of "flow" or "being in the zone" and are seen as a significant source of psychological happiness.[55] The most memorable and powerful depiction of nonaction in *Zhuangzi* is in the story of Cook Ding, a butcher who instructs the king how to "care for his life" through an extraordinary display of skill in butchering. As Cook Ding takes apart the ox with rhythmic power, he explains how to find "the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are."[56] By following along the natural grooves, his knife avoids contact with even the smallest ligament or bone. These remarks metaphorically represent an important recurring theme in the *Zhuangzi*: our lives go best when we are able to flow with the patterns of nature and steer around obstacles that impede us from flourishing. The best way of meeting these obstructions is not through direct, forceful confrontation, but by moving through them using more harmonious strategies.

While nonaction is marked by engagement in an activity through less rational control and more intuitive guidance, this does not mean it does not require effort or intense focus. As Cook Ding illustrates,

> However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I'm doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until—flop! the whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away.[57]

Zhuangzi recognizes that at times we are confronted with real, complex challenges, and that during those periods we must exert greater care and effort in order to handle them effectively. Nonaction, then, does not refer to wholly effortless processes (a point that also holds of "flow" activities that require focused attention), but skillful actions marked by attentiveness and absorption. By engaging in nonaction, one becomes fully immersed in the activity resulting in an exceedingly pleasurable state.

iii. Free and Easy Wandering (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊)

The concept of *you* (遊) is generally translated as "wandering" and at the most literal level refers to movement through space. But in its more metaphysical-cum-normative sense as employed by Zhuangzi, it is more about the mode or quality of engaging in life rather than a specific type of activity.

In the Cook Ding story discussed in the previous section, Cook Ding's knife is described as "wandering" through the hollows. Zhuangzi points toward fish swimming in the Hao River as a clear case of wandering:

> Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the dam of the Hao River when Zhuangzi said, "See how the minnows come out and dart around (*yóu* 遊) where they please! That's what fish really enjoy!"[58]

Swimming happily about in the Hao River, the fish are fully at ease in their natural element. They wander freely by following their natural, spontaneous inclinations, without interference from outside forces. According to Curie Virag, "*you* is an ideal of attunement

that is achieved through activity—be it physical, mental, or spiritual: when we *you*, we embody the flow and unimpeded movement of the cosmos itself."[59] Philip Ivanhoe comments similarly that to wander is to "follow our spontaneous inclinations, accord with the patterns and processes of the natural world and lose ourselves, secure in the comforting rhythms of the *dao*."[60]

There appears to be a close connection between nonaction and wandering. Taking a hint from Chris Fraser, we might see wandering as more about a style or mode of life more broadly, and nonaction as a concrete instance of wandering.[61] By engaging in nonaction we can participate in the free and easy wandering by synchronizing with the *dao*.

While wandering seems closely tied to a way of life that accords with the path set by the *dao*, the concept of wandering also seems to
p. 93 suggest a kind of unimpeded excursion ↳ that lacks any direction. Chris Fraser identifies this point as central to the notion of wandering:

> Like our everyday conception of "wandering around," Zhuangist wandering has no specified end other than itself. This is one of the respects in which it is non-contingent: as an activity, it is self-sufficient, depending on no fixed conditions outside of itself. It contrasts with having a fixed path to follow or a predetermined end or destination to reach…. Consider the analogy of a traveler who sets off simply to wander around a foreign city. Since she has no specified destination, she cannot fail to arrive at her goal. Nor need she ever consider herself "lost," since whatever route she happens to take can be a worthwhile path to explore[62]

There is a tension here between Zhuangzian wandering as admitting no fixed or determined end, as Fraser characterizes it, and the idea that wandering requires following along nature and the path of *dao.* After all, the *dao* transcends our individual desires or perspectives and prescribes the best course of action for attaining the good life. One possibility is that the notion of wandering is less about moving without a destination or aim than it is about moving along the path set by the *dao* in a way that is natural and unforced.[63] So the term "wandering" might be somewhat misleading since it suggests that one can engage in Zhuangzian wandering by taking up any path in life (such as those perpetuating horrendous evils), which I believe would be inaccurate.[64]

What the notion of wandering captures for Zhuangzi is the plurality of ways human beings can flourish. On Zhuangzi's view well-being is available to everyone, regardless of their particular situation, a claim firmly rejected by Confucians and Mohists. Consider the following passage from the *Mengzi:*

> Mengzi said, "Suppose someone has a ring finger that is bent and will not straighten. It is not the case that it hurts or that it interferes with one's activities. But if there is something that can straighten it, one will not consider the road from one end of the world to the other too far, because one's finger is not as good as other people's.[65]

We see a stark contrast with Zhuangzi, who in numerous passages elevates the lives of people that most people in early China would have dismissed or downgraded such as ex-convicts, butchers, amputees, and the physically disfigured. These models of sagehood on Zhuangzi's view, are able to live rich, satisfying lives even under harsh external conditions because they are attuned to each event as a part of the great process of transformation brought on by the *dao*:

> Life, death, preservation, loss, failure, success, poverty riches, worthiness, unworthiness, slander, fame, hunger, thirst, cold, heat—these are the alternations of the world, the workings of fate. Day and night they change place because for us wisdom cannot spy out their source. Therefore, they should not be enough to destroy your harmony; they should not be allowed to enter the storehouse of spirit. If you can harmonize and delight in them, master them and never be at a loss for
> p. 94 joy, if you can do this day ↳ and night without break and make it be spring with everything, mingling with all and creating the moment within your own mind—this is what I call being whole in power.[66]

Both everyday events and more profound human experiences often exceed our capacity for control. If we seek harmonious lives marked by interior peace and integrity, we must fortify our spirit against the destructive forces that threaten to derail us. The process of wandering in life allows one to keep one's heart and mind whole and intact, by flowing with the inevitable swings of both success and misfortunes that are in constant flux. In wandering we find a secure, interior freedom by joining our will with the flow of the *dao*.

VI. Conclusion

In closing I will identify a few ideas drawn from the previous discussions that seem especially relevant to contemporary discussions of well-being.

(a) *Relational Self and Well-Being.* The human self is relational in nature for all three classical Chinese traditions, leading to the view that well-being is inextricably bound up with either the well-being of others (as in Confucianism and Mohism) or with the broader natural world (as in Daoism). Because these views take the individual in a more expansive way, well-being also takes on a more expanded sense by including the well-being of others or fitting with nature. On the Confucian view, for example, our personal well-being includes as a proper part the well-being of our family—we simply cannot attribute well-being to someone (no matter how psychologically happy she is) if the rest of her family are faring badly.

(b) *Prudential Ecology.* Connected to the notion of the relational self, Confucianism and Mohism focus much more on social and familial contexts for achieving well-being. Confucianism takes the cultivation of virtues as playing a crucial role in creating a well-ordered society that they see as the necessary foundation for flourishing lives. Mohism takes impartial concern as the linchpin of a society that realizes the welfare of all. Whether or not the particular substantive claims of both traditions are correct, they are certainly right to emphasize the need to look at how various beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions of individuals create the sort of culture that is most conducive to well-being.

(c) *Against Welfare Subjectivism.* All three traditions, especially Confucianism and Daoism, take seriously the idea that we cannot obtain our well-being without following the path laid by the *dao*. That is to say, our well-being is not determined solely by our own individual attitudes or preferences. Both Confucianism and Daoism center on raising critical awareness of cultural norms and values, and how they often lead us down a path of misery.

(d) ↳ *Two Conceptions of Well-Being: Conditional and Unconditional.* Both Confucianism and Mohism accept certain human goods as necessary and fundamental to well-being. For the Confucians we cannot do without families, ritual practices, and music. The Mohists emphasize material needs, but also agree with the Confucians that social relationships are crucial for well-being. As we observed, however, Zhuangzi takes flourishing as a genuine possibility in even the harshest circumstances, such as suffering from a serious disease or the loss of those we love. And clearly for Zhuangzi, *contra* Confucians, elaborate funeral coffins or music are unnecessary for well-being. (On this point, Mozi would agree.)

On the Zhuangzian unconditional view, we can realize the best life for us under any conditions. The external conditions are not constitutive of or internal to our well-being. Cook Ding could have realized a flourishing life as Carpenter Ding or Fisherman Ding. What is most important is to adapt and respond properly to the external conditions that are presented to us.

On the conditional view, certain external conditions are not merely for our flourishing but are internal to our well-being. For the Confucians, without an opportunity to carry out a proper burial for one's parents, one simply cannot fare well (or as well as one could). There are just brute facts about what external conditions must be met to realize well-being.

I hope that this article has offered the reader a clear overview of the varying accounts of well-being we find in the classical Chinese tradition. Although there aren't always explicit arguments in defense of the various prudential goods that we find in these frameworks, the ideals of family, community, and free wandering will strike a chord with many readers, as they are firmly rooted in profound human desires and practical insight. For those seeking practical wisdom and improvement of their lives through philosophical reflection and inquiry, these classical Chinese traditions will continue to provide a trove of resources for living well, as they have done so for millions of readers across the world.[67]

Notes

1. **Some recent exceptions include Ivanhoe (2012), Fraser (2013, 2014), Olberding (2013); Tiwald (2015), and Kim (2015).**

2. **There is scholarly dispute surrounding the use of terms like "Confucianism" as well as the use of names like "Mencius,"**

"Mozi," or "Zhuangzi" due to genuine historical and Sinological complexities that cannot be addressed here. Because my primary aim in the chapter is to articulate the philosophical accounts of well-being in some early Chinese texts, I will employ as a working assumption that there are recognizable, unified traditions that we can identify as "Confucianism," "Mohism," and "Daoism." In appealing to particular thinkers like "Mencius," "Mozi," or "Zhuangzi," I mean to refer to the collection of ideas represented in the texts attributed to these figures, even though I acknowledge
p. 96 that ↳ the particular historical thinker may not be responsible for the ideas. For a defense of this approach see Eric Hutton (2014: xxii–xxiii).

3. Stephen Campbell (2015).

4. Stephen Darwall (2002: 14).

5. I use "psychological happiness" rather than just "happiness" because there is empirical evidence that even the term "happiness" is not used by most people as a nonnormative, purely psychological state. See Jonathan Phillips et al. (2017: 165–81).

6. It is worth noting that how one conceives of this relationship turns greatly on one's conception of psychological happiness—whether it is a matter of sensory pleasure, attitudinal pleasure, life satisfaction, or emotional state. I thank Justin Tiwald for this point.

7. See Alicia Hall and Valerie Tiberius (2020) for a discussion of this distinction. As they note there are some subtle distinctions at play that we cannot get into here.

8. I borrow this term from Daniel Haybron (2008: 253–82).

9. I draw on Carine Defoort's work (2018) on *li* (利) in early Chinese philosophy.

10. "是故聖人之於聲色滋味也, 利於性 則取之, 害於性則舍之" (*Lushi Chunqiu* I/2.3:2/17–18). I have followed the translation of Defoort (2018: 159).

11. Hutton (2014: 8), my emphasis. All translations on the *Xunzi* are from Hutton (2014).

12. "夫利有二. 有貨財之利, 有安吉之利. 惠王曰 '何以利吾國' 何以知不欲安吉之利, 而 孟子徑難以貨財之利也." This is a modification of the translation from Carine Defoort (2018: 170).

13. Ivanhoe (2012).

14. I explore these prudential goods more closely in Kim (2020).

15. I think the early Confucian account of well-being chimes well with what Michael Bishop (2015) calls a "network theory of well-being" that takes well-being as consisting in a reinforcing cycle of positive emotions, attitudes, and activities.

16. For an in-depth treatment of the connections between moral development and familial environments see Erin M. Cline (2015)

17. *Analects* 7.15. Translations from the *Analects* are from Slingerland (2003).

18. *Mengzi* 6A12. Translations from the *Mengzi* are from Van Norden (2008).

19. Hutton (2014: 8).

20. *Analects* 6.11.

21. *Mengzi* 4A27.2.

22. Hutton (2014: 232).

23. For a discussion of the role and significance of wholeheartedness in the Confucian tradition, see Justin Tiwald (2018: Section IV).

24. Shun (2014).

25. *Mengzi* 2B7.

26. Hutton (2014: 218).

27. For an interpretation that closely attends to the negative emotions experienced by Confucius see Amy Olberding (2013). Amy Olberding argues that Confucius's commitment to a life of virtue actually led to sacrificing his well-being, a claim that is in conflict with the virtue perfectionist interpretation offered in this chapter.

28. *Mengzi* 6A10.

29. Chris Fraser (2016: 141). Philip Ivanhoe interprets Mozi as a "state consequentialist" who takes the standard of right action as ultimately aimed at the good of the state. See Philip J. Ivanhoe (2000: 15). While Fraser agrees with Ivanhoe
p. 97 about the general communal ↳ orientation, Fraser believes the standard of right action lies in what benefits the most people (perhaps including Heaven and ghosts).

30. Fraser (2016: 155).

31. For recent discussions of *Jian Ai* see BACK Youngsun (2017), LOY Hui-chieh (2013), Carine Defoort and Nicholas Standaert (2013), and Bryan W. Van Norden (2007).

32. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to reflect on this chapter.

33. Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2005: 92).

34. Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2005: 92).

35. As Aristotle notes, "wealth is clearly not the [highest] good we are looking for, since it is useful, and for the sake of something else. Aristotle (2002: Book 1, Chapter 5: 1096a6).

36. Fraser (2016: 139).

37. Van Norden (2007: 151). But these historical cases are compatible with the position that populousness is intrinsically valuable. It could just be that in these cases the intrinsic value of populousness is outweighed by other important concerns.

38. *Mozi* Ch. 11. I have followed the translation of Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2005).

39. The early Confucians, for example, would have insisted on taking aesthetic value as a constituent of well-being. See Loy (2016) for a discussion of this issue focusing on Xunzi and Mozi.

40. This is an instance of a more general problem for consequentialism that is sometimes dubbed the "demandingness objection." There are a variety of responses made by contemporary philosophers that attempt to decrease the demands generated by consequentialism such as *satisficing consequentialism* (Slote 1985) or *progressive consequentialism* (Elliot and Jamieson 2009). It is unclear to what extent these responses can be applied to Mozi, but Chris Fraser offers a response from a Mohist perspective in Fraser (2016: 172–84).

41. *Mozi*, Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2005: 69).

42. *Mozi*, Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2005: 74–75).

43. For this line of reasoning I draw on Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals*: "If I am to flourish to the full extent that is possible for a human being, then my whole life has to be of a certain kind, one in which I not only engage in and achieve some measure of success in the activities of an independent practical reasoner, but also receive and have a reasonable expectation of receiving the attentive care needed when I am very young, old and ill, or injured. So each of us achieves our good only if and insofar as others make our good their good by helping us through periods of disability to become ourselves the kind of human being … who makes the good of others her or his good … " (MacIntyre 1999: 108)

44. For a collection of essays that acknowledges the therapeutic ends of the *Zhuangzi*, see Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (1996).

45. One of the most famous stories that captures the skeptical spirit of Daoism is the story of "An Old Man Who Lost His Horse" (*saiweng shi ma* 塞翁失馬) from the Huainanzi 淮南子, a second-century BCE text from the Han Dynasty. The story shows how various events that seem to be clearly good or bad—losing and gaining a horse, a son breaking his leg from a fall—can turn out to actually be a blessing (or curse) in disguise; our judgments about the prudential value or disvalue of any state of affairs can be deeply mistaken. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this story and relevant philosophical points.

46. The *Daodejing* is traditionally attributed to a mythical thinker named Laozi 老子 or "Old Master." Scholars are in general agreement that while Laozi was not an actual historical figure, Zhuangzi was an actual person.

p. 98 47. As scholars point out, the *Zhuangzi* is not a product of a single historical voice and was constructed over time by different thinkers. So as in the case of references to Mengzi, Xunzi, or Mozi, the use of the name Zhuangzi to refer to the thoughts contained in this text should not be taken as assuming that the historical Zhuangzi is responsible for the various ideas.

48. Paul Kjellberg (1996: 13).

49. For a relativist reading of the *Zhuangzi*, see Hansen (1983, 2003).

50. Watson (1968: 9). All translations of the *Zhuangzi*, unless noted otherwise, are from Watson (1968).

51. Ivanhoe (1996: 201).

52. Watson (1968: 11).

53. See Philip J. Ivanhoe (1996: 200–201) and Justin Tiwald (2015: 61–62) for further discussion.

54. Zhuangzi, Chapter 18. For an account that addresses the complexities of basic emotions like grief in the *Zhuangzi* see Olberding (2007).

55. The classic treatment of "flow" is in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008).

56. Watson (1968: 20).

57. Watson (1968: 20).

58. Watson (1968: 137–38).

59. Virag (2017: 155).

60. Ivanhoe (2012).

61. Fraser (2014: 556).

62. Fraser (2014: 552).

63. Despite his comments, Fraser does claim that the *Dao* provides a certain structure and pattern that we must follow. See Fraser (2014: 562).

64. This issue is connected to a scholarly controversy regarding the *Zhuangzi*: whether Zhuangzi endorsed some form of ethical relativism. See Hansen (2003) for a defense of relativism in Zhuangzi, and Kjellberg and Ivanhoe (1996) for an antirelativist reading.

65. *Mengzi* 6A12. I thank Eirik Harris for drawing this passage to my attention.

66. Watson (1968: 69).

67. For advice and helpful comments, I would like to thank BACK Youngsun, Eirik L. Harris, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Justin Tiwald, and an anonymous reviewer.

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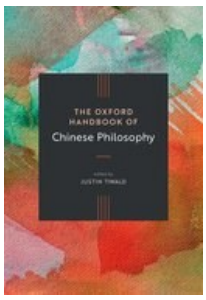

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CHAPTER

6 Human Nature in the Ethics of Mengzi and Xunzi

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Abstract

Mengzi and Xunzi sometimes state their views in ways that make them look diametrically opposed to each other: the former says that human nature is good, while the latter says that human nature is bad. This chapter details how both explain their views in more complex and qualified ways that overlap in what they both acknowledge. Mengzi acknowledges inborn dispositions that can impede moral cultivation; Xunzi acknowledges inborn dispositions that contribute positive motivation for cultivation. Both Confucians have much to contribute to contemporary debates over what it means to say that a disposition is part of human nature. Mengzi points to ways that the inborn can involve a readiness to respond to conditions that spur its further development. Xunzi points to ways that cultural practices and norms can express and spur further development of inborn dispositions or regulate and restrain them. Contemporary scientific studies are marshaled to show that their views are as relevant today as when they were alive.

Keywords: : Confucius, human nature, goodness, badness, Mengzi, moral sprouts, Xunzi
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
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I. Introduction

Mengzi's and Xunzi's views of human nature (*rén xìng* 人性) and moral development constitute one of the most important and influential parts of Chinese philosophy. They have immediate relevance not only to philosophers from a broad array of traditions, but indeed to all laypeople with the least bit of curiosity about the human condition. Many of their views are receiving support from contemporary scientific theorizing about the evolutionary inheritance of the human species and from empirical study of the ways in which both cognition and affect interweave in moral development. Both thinkers sometimes articulated their theories in simplistic "headline" versions: for Mengzi it is the saying that human nature is good; for Xunzi, that it is bad. Both thinkers go on to explain their views in more complex and qualified ways, often guided by practical considerations about how people might make themselves better. The ultimate difference between them is much more subtle than the headlines and yet still important. Understanding that difference will require sorting through the ambiguities in the ways they present their own views, as well as assessing the accuracy of Xunzi's explicit criticism of Mengzi. But doing that will, as it turns out, be helpful in sorting through the ambiguities that beset our own thinking about human nature and moral development.[1]

II. Mengzi on *Ren Xing* as a Basis for Moral Self-Cultivation

In Mengzi's time, the meaning of the word "*xìng* 性" included the characteristic tendencies or desires that a thing has by virtue of
p. 102 being alive. Such tendencies might ↳ include a characteristic direction of development as the thing changes over time. Roger Ames (1991, 2002) has argued that "*ren xing*" should not be translated as "human nature" because of the essentialist connotation of the Western term—that there is a fixed set of properties both necessary and sufficient for being human. It seems reasonable to avoid attributing such essentialism to the *Mengzi*'s use of *ren xing* because it is unclear, as Shun has pointed out, that early Chinese thinkers drew a distinction between essential and accidental properties. In his analysis of "what is genuine" (*qíng* 情), which Mengzi associates closely with *xing* in 6A6 and 6A8, Shun (1997: 185) suggests that it might refer to "certain characteristic features of human beings that are particularly conspicuous, pervasive, and difficult to alter, without necessarily having the connotation of what is essential as opposed to accidental." When Mengzi's and Xunzi's views about "human nature" are discussed here, this meaning will be presupposed.

In his conception of characteristic features of human beings, Mengzi highlights what is given at birth and unlearned and a direction of development toward moral virtue. What is given, in other words, is something that is prepared to change toward virtue. Accordingly, Mengzi criticizes another philosopher, Gaozi, for equating *ren xing* with the purely biological desires for food and sex. Gaozi first expresses his view through the metaphor of making a willow tree into cups and bowls (6A1). The moral shape comes from outside human nature, not inside. Mengzi replies that if becoming moral is really like making cups and bowls from a willow tree, then instilling virtue into persons is a violation of one's nature. In that case, who would want to become virtuous? Gaozi then disowns these unwelcome implications by alternatively proposing that human nature is like swirling water. Make an opening on the eastern side, and it flows east. Make an opening on the western wide, and it flows west. Mengzi counters that water does have a tendency to flow downward, and it is this tendency that is like tendencies toward ethical growth in human beings (6A2).

Drawing on another implication of water metaphor, Mengzi suggests an explanation of why people do not always act on their tendencies to ethical growth. Just as water can be forced upward by splashing it or damning it up, so human nature can be channeled away from goodness. The positive side of this implication is that absent the abnormal situation of the "damning up" or "splashing" of growth away from virtue, people will become moral. Damming up or splashing constitutes an interference with the natural flow of water. The basic idea seems comparable to the contemporary "dispositional" analysis of the innate given by philosophers such as Stephen Stich (1975) and Elliot Sober (1998)—roughly, that a trait is innate if and only if it appears in the normal course of development as part of the typical phenotype of that kind of organism. Mengzi's notion of interference might be construed as departure from the normal.

However, another metaphor in the *Mengzi* potentially has very different implications for how development toward virtue takes place. The word Mengzi uses for dispositions that contain the direction toward the moral is *duān* 端, which is translatable as "beginning," "germ," or "sprout," and is used in 2A6 to refer to the four mind or feelings[2] (*xīn* 心) that develop into four virtues: compassion

p. 103 grows into human-heartedness (*rén* 仁), dislike/shame grows into rightness (*yì* 義), deference grows into ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮), ↳ and approval/disapproval grows into wisdom (*zhì* 智). Though *duan* need not necessarily be translated as "sprout," Mengzi sometimes explicitly uses the horticultural metaphor for the way people become moral:

> Mengzi said, "In years of abundance, most of the young people have the wherewithal to be good, while in years of adversity, most of them become violent. This is not a matter of difference in the native capacities sent down by Heaven but rather of what overwhelms their minds.
>
> Now, let barley be sown and covered with earth; the ground being the same, and the time of planting also the same, it grows rapidly, and in due course of time, it all ripens. Though there may be differences in the yield, this is because of the fertility of the soil, the nourishment of the rain and the dew, and the human effort invested are not the same. (6A7, translation from Bloom 2009: 125).

Unlike the water metaphor, the sprout metaphor suggests a crucial *positive* role for environmental factors. More than simply needing noninterference, sprouts need fertile, tilled soil and adequate sun and water. In 1A5, Mengzi explicitly holds the king responsible for providing material security to his subjects by lessening punishments, reducing taxes, instituting efficient farming methods, and refraining from unnecessary military adventures that take men away from their families. In 1A7, Mengzi holds the king responsible not only for ensuring the people's livelihood but also for schools to provide ethical instruction. Furthermore, Mengzi places responsibility on people to cultivate their own sprouts. In 6A14, where Mengzi says that one who nurtures the smaller part of the self becomes a small person, while one who nurtures the greater part of the self becomes a great person. People who are always eating and drinking are considered by others to nurture what is small and lose what is great. Nurturing the greater part of oneself is explained in 6A15 as the mind's thinking, reflecting, focusing one's attention on something, or turning it over in one's mind (*sī* 思). Reflecting, the mind will get it; not reflecting, the mind will not get it.

Note further that the nurturing environmental conditions for which Mengzi holds the king responsible (secure livelihood and ethical education) and the personal effort required of all people are interdependent in their effects on filling out the sprouts. Ethical education needs accompaniment by reflection on manifestations of their own sprouts, for without such reflection, ethical education will get nowhere. A secure livelihood enables people to have the time and personal resources to devote to reflection, and a king's reflecting on manifestations of his sprouts is needed for him to provide these nurturing environmental conditions for his people. There is in fact some striking recent confirmation of the necessity for a secure livelihood for adequate reflection in a contemporary scientific study of the effects of poverty on cognitive performance. The effects of being poor and having to cope with the ensuing stresses are equivalent to losing a full night of sleep, having 13 points deducted from one's IQ, or to the difference between being a chronic alcoholic and a normal adult (Mani et al. 2013). Mengzi's specification of the conditions for development of the moral
p. 104 sprouts does not ↳ correspond to what was "normal" in his time. Kings who provided a secure livelihood and ethical education for their people and who kept the peace with other states were not doing the "normal" thing in the sense of what is expectable or statistically frequent. That is why the water and sprout metaphors have potentially very different implications for the question of when one can expect moral development to occur. Mengzi quite possibly did not recognize the significant differences between the conceptions of human nature articulated by the water and sprout metaphors. This would explain the significant variations in the way ethical development is described throughout the text. Sometimes ethical development is characterized in ways more consistent with the water metaphor and with the corresponding dispositional model of human nature as containing directional tendencies that get realized in the absence of interference. 4B12 says, "The great person does not lose his child's mind." In 4B19, the superior person is said to *preserve* that which distinguishes human beings from the birds and beasts. 4B28 portrays superior people as *preserving* their minds. In 6A6 the minds of compassion, shame/dislike, deference, and approval/disapproval are *identified outright with the virtues* rather than with the sprouts of the virtues as in 2A6. In 6A6, Mengzi characterizes the four *virtues* as not fused to us from the outside but, rather, *already in us*. 6A10 describes the worthy person as one who is able *not to lose* the mind that everyone shares. 6A11 describes being unethical as a matter of losing one's mind and learning as *a matter of seeking the lost mind*. This language of the virtues already being within us, of preserving, not losing, and seeking the lost mind is language that de-emphasizes development or the contingency of development and the interaction of nature and nurture.

It is unsurprising that the *Mengzi* displays some uncertainty and ambivalence about what it means for something to be in something's nature. We are, after all, still debating this question today. Organisms do have traits that develop across a wide range of

environments, and we might conclude that it is an intrinsic part of their "nature" to develop these traits regardless of wide variation in environmental conditions. As philosophers of science have noted, "developmental fixity," or relative immunity to environmental influence, has been bundled together with other features in the vernacular concept of the innate, such as being unlearned, present at birth, and typical or characteristic of the species. Mengzi's use of the idea that water flows downward in the absence of interference corresponds to this feature of relative immunity to environmental influence. It is now increasingly recognized, however, that the various features we associate with something's nature are not always found together, and that it is fallacious to infer from something's being unlearned, for example, that it is developmentally fixed (e.g., see Griffiths 2002; Maclaurin 2002). What is unlearned, in fact, might be a tendency to develop in certain directions *within a range of environmental influences*. What is something's nature might be its *susceptibility to being nurtured in certain directions given this range of influences*. Moreover, there is biological evidence that imperviousness to environmental influence is an illusion. Mallard ducks respond to the "assembly call" (coming when called) that their mothers vocalize. They do this over a wide range of environments—in woods, incubators, and even with chicken foster parents. For this reason, one might think that they have some kind of fixed innate program that ↳ ensures that
p. 105 they will respond to that type of call. However, Gilbert Gottlieb (1991) found that it was exposure to the sound of the mother's call *before* they are hatched that seems to prompt development of a preference to the mother's call over that of, say, a chicken foster parent. In the absence of embryonic exposure to the mother's call, mallard ducklings will respond to the call of other species. The illusion of imperviousness to environmental influence can be replaced by the notion of "canalization," first articulated by C. H. Waddington (1942). Strongly canalized traits develop in many different environments such that the developmental pathways leading to such traits are like very deep trenches that strongly discourage but nevertheless allow in unusual circumstances deviation from those pathways. In contrast, weakly canalized traits develop by traveling down relatively shallow pathways and therefore seem to be more sensitive to the organisms' developmental environments (Moore 2003: 187).

In the English vernacular the meaning of what it is for something to be innate or part of one's nature can obscure the difference between strongly and weakly canalized traits. The meaning can also compound the problem by allowing us to speak of a trait's development as taking place along its natural trajectory under "normal" circumstances, as in Sober's (1998) and Stich's (1975) analyses. In English, what is "normal" is ambiguous between a descriptive sense—what *usually* takes place as a matter of statistical frequency—and a normative sense—what takes place if the circumstances favorable to the trait's development are in place. We are more likely to employ the normative sense when the trait's development is regarded as a good or desirable result, and moreover we may not distinguish the normative from the descriptive sense. Assuming that we want a barley sprout to grow vigorously, then, we might regard the circumstances requisite for such growth to be "normal," and that will be true in the normative sense but not necessarily in the descriptive sense. Knobe and Samuels (2013), in a study of how value judgments influence people's judgments about what is innate, have found that if a trait develops under conditions that are morally desirable, in contrast to conditions that are morally undesirable, people were more likely to judge it to be innate. For example, for an unnamed and undescribed trait *X*, people were more inclined to judge it to be innate if it developed in a child who was treated decently by their parents, in comparison with the condition in which it developed in a child who was treated poorly by their parents. This particular experiment is especially relevant to Mengzi's point in 1A7 that people will not develop constant minds if they do not have a secure livelihood. Even if secure livelihoods are not "usual" in a society, people may nevertheless be more inclined to judge a trait to be innate if it develops under such morally desirable conditions. Scientists and nonscientists alike showed this tendency. Both groups, moreover, when prompted to reflect in a more principled way about the relevance of morally desirable conditions for their judgments about innateness, tended to correct themselves and rule out the relevance of such conditions. It is possible that the tendency to conflate the normal as the usual and the normal as the desirable crosses cultures and historical eras, and it may have played a role in the apparent lack of awareness in the *Mengzi* of the importantly different implications of the water and sprout metaphors. An ancient tendency that appears across
p. 106 cultures is to see the order displayed in natural phenomena as somehow obedient to a norm. If ↳ there is departure from that norm, it might be judged a kind of unnatural interference, where "interference" shares in ambiguity between descriptive and normative present in "normal."

We are best off dispensing with conceptions of human nature that depend on confusing notions of the "normal," and by implication, we are best off dispensing with the water metaphor, with its notion of development in the absence of "interference." The crucial issue is what the conditions are for the development of any unlearned dispositions that tend toward the moral because we need to get clear on what conditions to try to put into place. In doing so, we are being true to Mengzi's underlying practical aim in trying to get the kings of Chinese states to adopt the Confucian Way.

At the same time, it does seem as if both the water and the sprout metaphor capture some of the possible meanings for certain tendencies or dispositions to be part of a thing's nature. These possible meanings can be understood in terms of the canalization metaphor. Mengzian unlearned dispositions can be more or less canalized in their developmental pathways. They would be less canalized if conditions necessary for their development include active efforts to develop them, and if these active efforts are relatively infrequent in occurrence. In that case it would be more accurate to think of them as sprouts that need effortful, proactive nurturing. They would be more canalized if the conditions for development were relatively frequent in occurrence and if other conditions that have the effect of stopping or reversing development were relatively infrequent. In that case, Mengzian dispositions would be more canalized, and it would be more accurate to think of them as having a direction of growth like that of water flowing downward, going in that direction by default unless actively interfered with. In fact, we can even reconceive relatively more canalized traits in terms of the sprout metaphor, since there are kinds of plants that are very hardy and grow under a wide range of environmental conditions. Ones that are undesirable and difficult to get rid of are "weeds." Mengzi, in 2A2, identifies two kinds of mistakes with respect to growing the moral sprouts. One is illustrated by the man from Song who tried to make his seedlings grow faster by pulling on them. By contrast, those believing they cannot benefit the seedlings therefore neglect them and do not weed around them. The question about the sprouts of human goodness, then, is where on such a continuum they lie.

Arguably, Mengzi was closer to the target in using the barley sprout metaphor, where the sprout is certainly not that of a weed, but of a plant that needs for its development deliberate and sustained nurture from others and the self, and other favorable conditions that are not extremely rare but not common either. It is revealing that in 6A9, where Mengzi talks of a king who exposes his sprouts to the cold for 10 days and to warmth for only a day, he also uses the metaphor of playing a game like chess or go, and compares a player who applies themself to learning from the master with another who is thinking about shooting a swan as the master tries to teach them. Mengzi's sprout metaphor brings out more clearly and directly a plausible conception of moral development as an interactive blend of the biological and the environmental. To understand how a person develops morally, we must understand not
p. 107 only some inborn directions of growth but also the way that their development requires fostering from environmental influences. ↳ There is more of a focus on understanding how things develop in an environmental context and in relationship to other things. This relational focus is also present in Xunzi's conception of human nature and moral development. Interestingly, Richard Nisbett and his colleagues have found similar and related differences between (lay) East Asians and Westerners and have claimed that East Asians are more inclined (as a first option) to employ a relational and holistic approach to understanding things, while Westerners are more inclined (as a first option) to employ an analytic approach of trying to understand something by breaking it down into its component parts, by looking inside the thing rather than relating it to others (see Choi, Nisbett, and Norenzayan 1999; Nisbett 2004). There may be deeply rooted reasons why the sprout metaphor appears in a Chinese text, and what is of additional great interest is the fact that some recent Western science is pointing us in a direction where such a metaphor seems highly salient. There may be a good reason, then, to bring early Chinese thought into dialogue with recent science.

III. Mengzi's Theory of Compassion as a Beginning of Morality in Human Nature

How plausible is Mengzi's theory that there are inborn beginnings of morality in human nature? The previous section addresses one aspect of this question, which is how these beginnings are to be conceived as directions of growth: how fixed is development in the direction provided by the inborn, and what role do learning, culture, and individual experience play in interaction with what is inborn? Mengzi also had fairly specific ideas about the content of what is inborn that play a crucial role in his conception of how it develops. For reasons of space, this section shall focus on compassion and its development into the virtue of human-heartedness. Compassion is the beginning of morality that figures most prominently in what Mengzi has to say about the character of the beginnings and how they can be developed.

In 2A6 Mengzi identifies the beginning of human-heartedness as compassion, using the phrase "*burenren zhi xin* 不忍人之心," the mind or feeling that is unable to bear the suffering of others. Mengzi supports his attribution of this sprout to all human beings by giving the example of the alarm and distress (*chùtì cèyǐn zhī xīn* 怵惕惻隱之心) that anyone would feel upon seeing a child about to fall into a well. He stresses that there is no ulterior motive for this reaction: not the desire to get in good with the child's parents or to have a good reputation among one's neighbors and not dislike of the child's cries. Compassion can be felt for any human being (the

child need not be a relative), and it can be felt for animals (1A7). Mengzi also holds that unlearned concern for the welfare of one's family is and should be stronger than one's concern for nonrelated others (3A5, 6A4, 7A45) and that it has a foundational role in the development of the virtue of *ren* as human-heartedness (4A27). As a virtue, human-heartedness might be explained as appropriate
p. 108 concern for and love of others (*ai* 愛), which is most strongly directed toward ↳ one's family members and especially one's parents (7A15) but is inclusive of all human beings and motivates one not to mistreat animals (2A6, 4A4, 4B28, 6A6, 7A33, 7A46, 7B1, 7B31). Caring and love here are to be understood as both attitudinal and behavioral: caring and loving as feeling and acting appropriately.

Given common views of human *qi* 氣, or vital energies, of Mengzi's time, it is reasonable to attribute to him the view that liking (*hào* 好) and disliking (*wù* 惡) are the most basic forms of cognitive-affective tendencies that arise from a person's vital energies that compose the body (Chan 2002: 51). Compassion may be understood as disliking another's suffering and liking of sparing the other from suffering. So understood, such disliking and liking have several dimensions or components: cognitive, motivational, and feeling.

The cognitive component includes abilities to discriminate those who are suffering or in danger of suffering. The text does not provide a definitive position on how much of this cognitive component is supposed to be inborn. Certain passages in the *Mengzi* suggest that the cognitive component may involve or eventually develop into additional and more sophisticated cognitive abilities. In the 1A7 story of King Xuan and the ox, the king decides to spare an ox being led to ritual slaughter because the ox's fear reminded him of an *innocent* man going to execution. In 3A5, Mengzi, in dialogue with the Mohist Yi Zhi, again returns to his example of a child about to fall into a well, and this time implies that a relevant feature of the appropriate response to it lies in the child's *innocence*: it is not the child's fault, he says, that it is about to fall into the well. Thus, the dislike that goes into the sprout of compassion is a dislike for the suffering of innocents, those who do not deserve to suffer, and the cognitive component of this disliking must involve the ability to discriminate innocents.

It is consistent with Mengzi's conception of the sprouts as inborn, incipient dispositions to hold that whatever is inborn about the cognitive component need not deliver judgments or beliefs in any full-blooded sense. A child can feel alarm and distress over a favorite doll's broken arm. She may perceive the doll to be suffering, but does she believe it? Such phenomena indicate that the cognitive component can sometimes remain at the level of "seeing something *x* as if it were *y*" that precedes and often, but not always, turns into belief.[3] The phrase "*x* as if it were a *y*" is neutral as to whether *x* really is a *y*. This capacity to see something in terms of something else is a type of detection of recurring patterns, and it allows us to entertain possibilities without fully committing to their reality. The capacity to see in terms of analogy, to see *x* in terms of *y* based on similarities between *x* and *y*, is fundamental to human cognition (Gentner 2003). It is used to understand one less intelligible or accessible realm of experience in terms of another more intelligible or accessible realm (consider the analogy of billiard balls in motion to explain molecular or atomic motion, or the analogy of the computer to explain the workings of the mind). It is used in persuasion and argument ("Afghanistan is no place for the United States to be; it's another Vietnam"). Because this sort of cognitive strategy for making sense of the world is so basic to human life, it is plausible that the wiring for such a capacity might be set up so that much of our seeing something as
p. 109 another thing is nonconscious and automatic but could have been even more adaptive for ↳ this capacity, when it undergoes further development, to be able to take sophisticated and reflective forms, whereby one can deliberate over whether *x* is sufficiently similar to past instances of *y*'s so as to justify turning the seeing of *x* as a *y* into a warranted judgment.

The motivational component consists of the way that disliking and liking can prompt action. Liking and disliking are movements of vital energies that correspond to felt attraction and aversion, and these movements of the body's vital energies can result in action. The mind forms aims (*zhi* 志), and when these aims are focused or concentrated (*yi* 壹[4]), the vital energies follow and manifest as movements of the body. But the influence between the formation of aims and movements of the body's vital energies is reciprocal, because the body's vital energies can concentrate so as to influence the mind to form certain aims (2A2). Compassion may be thought of as inborn tendencies for the body's vital energies to move in certain directions in response to the perceived or anticipated suffering of others, and this may influence the mind (which is simply a part of the body and therefore also composed of vital energies) to form aims resulting in action. The way that liking and disliking can motivate is tied up with the pleasure and pain that they give rise to. For Mengzi, it seems built into the nature of what it is for something to be a sprout that not only do we have predispositions to liking and disliking, but we also feel the corresponding pleasure and pain when their objects are attained or when their attainment is anticipated. Anticipated pain is already illustrated by the alarm and distress that people feel upon anticipating the

child falling into the well. Perhaps the most striking expression of this view on the positive side is 4A27, where Mengzi says that the most authentic expression of music (*yùe* 樂) is taking joy (*lè* 樂) in serving parents (which is the most authentic expression of *rén* 仁 or humaneness) and in following one's older brother (which is the most authentic expression of *yì* 義 or rightness). Mengzi plays further on the fact that the words for music and joy are homonyms (樂) by going on to say that

When there is joy, they grow, and when they grow, how can they be stopped? When they come to the point where they cannot be stopped, then, without realizing it, one's feet begin to step in time to them and one's hands begin to dance them out. (Bloom 2009: 84)

The motivational element of a sprout need not and typically does not dictate *specific* action tendencies. In Mengzi's example of the reaction to the child in peril, the response is characterized only as the alarm and distress, not the actual act of trying to save the child. One reason why emotions do not always result in overt actions is that they can be overridden as motivators by other emotions or interests a person has. Furthermore, even if one wanted to act from an emotion, the specific nature of such action would depend on the circumstances. My first reaction to the child crawling toward the well may be to rush over and grab it, but I may be too far away to get there in time, and my best action may be to shout to others closer to the child. But even though emotions do not necessarily include specific action tendencies, they do act as an impetus for action of some kind. Emotions often urge us to do *something*, but
p. 110 which thing that is remains to be determined. Part of what culture does is to provide us scripts for satisfying these ↳ motivations given certain kinds of situations. Individual learning, personality, goals, and reflection and deliberation also go into shaping what specific actions emerge from our emotions.

The third, feeling, visceral component is illustrated by the felt alarm and distress upon anticipating the child's falling into the well. The alarm and distress have a visceral tone to them in the way that fear for someone's welfare can grip the body and prepare it to act: the breath catches, heart rate goes up, and muscles tense. One can think of this component as bodily awareness of the motivational element's being activated.

This Mengzian picture receives support from recent scientific investigations of compassion. Consider Mengzi's conception of the primal responses to another's suffering as spontaneous and automatic rather than calculated or a matter of judging or inferring. In their classic study utilizing brain imaging of couples in love with each other, Singer et al. (2004) found that empathizing with the pain of one's romantic partner was automatic (nonconscious) and involved activation of brain areas that processed the "affective" component of pain, that is, how unpleasant the subjectively felt pain is for the empathizer, but not the entire "pain matrix," which processes sensations as to where pain is located. Consider the feeling, visceral component of compassion. Immordino-Yang and her colleagues (2009) conducted brain-imaging studies on subjects they had exposed to narratives. Some were based on true stories designed to evoke admiration of morally virtuous behavior or for morally neutral skill; other narratives were designed to evoke compassion for someone suffering physical pain (sustained through physical injury) or for someone suffering psychological/social pain (e.g., grief, despair, social rejection). The results of the imaging studies indicated that regulatory neural mechanisms responsible for sensing and regulating body functions and known to be engaged in "basic" emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness are also engaged in the experience of admiration and compassion. In having these feelings, our bodies are literally moved.

Consider Mengzi's view that the motivational component of compassion is tied up with pleasure and pain. Jorge Moll and his colleagues (2006) conducted brain-imaging studies of participants who chose on the basis of ethical beliefs to give anonymously to charity. They found that such giving was correlated with activation of reward systems in brain networks that are also activated by food, sex, drugs, and money. In some trials, individuals quickly accepted the option of receiving $5 for themselves with no consequences for any charity. On other trials, individuals chose to give some of their earnings so that a charity could receive $5. As a group, they showed even greater activity in the reward system in choosing this option than when they took the money all for themselves. Telzer et al. (2010) found that a majority of teenagers who were asked to make costly donations to their families (on the precondition that their families could not spend the money on them) experienced increased reward system activity. Inagaki and Eisenberger (2012) found that girlfriends who held their boyfriends' arms while the boyfriends received an electric shock showed more activity in their reward systems than when holding a ball instead of an arm (not surprisingly), but also more activity than when holding their boyfriends' arm when the boyfriends were not receiving an electric shock (more surprisingly).

p. 111 It is even plausible to generalize from an inborn disposition to respond to suffering to an inborn disposition to help others (when there is perception that these others need assistance of some kind). From as early as 12 months of age infants point at an object to help an adult find it (Liszkowski et al. 2006). By 18 months, infants help other people achieve their goals by fetching out-of-reach objects or removing obstacles for them (Warneken and Tomasello 2006). Over the course of the second year of life, children's helping behavior develops to include sharing even at some cost to themselves (Brownell, Svetlova, and Nichols 2009; Svetlova, Nichols, and Brownell 2010). Twenty-month-old children who had previously received material rewards for helping were subsequently less likely to engage in further helping as compared with children who had received no such reward, suggesting that infants' helping behavior is intrinsically motivated and is thus undermined by an extrinsic material reward (Warneken and Tomasello 2008). When pupil dilation is taken as an indication of emotional arousal in two-year-old children, they seem to be intrinsically motivated to personally help a person and when they see that person being helped by a third party (and arousal in both cases is different from that when the person is not being helped at all). That is, intrinsic motivation for young children's helping behavior does not require that they perform the behavior themselves and thus "get credit" for it but, rather, requires only that the other person be helped. Thus, from an early age, humans seem to have genuine concern for the welfare of others (Hepach, Vaish, and Tomasello 2012).

All this supports Mengzi's idea that dispositions tending toward the moral can directly yield pleasure when acted upon. To the extent that we act on the moral beginnings, then, we experience pleasure, which may motivate us to again further act upon the sprouts, which in turn further reinforces such action. This is why Mengzi uses metaphors in 2A6 that suggest the *acceleration* of moral growth once it is started in earnest:

> When we know how to enlarge and bring to fulfillment these four sprouts that are within us, it will be like a fire beginning to burn or a spring finding an outlet. If one is able to bring them to fulfillment, they will be sufficient to enable him to protect "all within the four seas"; if one is not, they will be insufficient even to enable him to serve his parents. (Bloom 2009: 35–36)

The idea that pleasure serves as a reward for acting on compassion, as shall be discussed later, is critical to Mengzi's conception of how human beings not only can be motivated to act on their sprouts but also to further cultivate those sprouts.

Finally, consider the cognitive component. Disliking another's suffering involves the capacity to perceive the suffering of another, and going to the aid of another requires the perception that the other needs aid. In the experiments mentioned earlier, young children act on such perceptions and render aid. It is unlikely that such perceptual abilities are present at birth, but the incipient dispositions to develop such perceptual abilities might be part of our biological inheritance. When 14-month-old children notice an adult stranger trying and failing to pick up an object, most children hand the object to the adult without being asked or offered a reward. They
p. 112 noticed that the stranger was ↳ struggling and what they wanted, and they helped (Warneken and Tomasello 2007). When left alone with what appeared to be a real crying infant, most babies between 12 and 24 months old registered concern on their faces, and some attempted to comfort the apparent infant by offering it a toy (Nichols, Svetlova, and Brownell 2009).

IV. Growth of the Sprouts: The Case of Compassion Growing into Human-Heartedness

This section explores Mengzi's conception of how compassion is grown or "extended" into human-heartedness. Growth in compassion involves the extension of cognition—acquiring new knowledge—and the extension of motivation accompanied by visceral feeling for the welfare of others—being ready to act on behalf of others and in ways one has not displayed in the past. Though cognitive and motivational extension are typically intertwined, it is useful to discuss cognitive extension in isolation and then to discuss how it is related to motivational extension.

i. Cognitive Extension

It has previously been noted that the Mengzian sprout of compassion involves capacities to discriminate the patterns of actual or imminent suffering of others and more generally to discern that others are in need of help. Clearly, people can extend those capacities as they learn more about the different ways that people are interdependent on each other in the various cooperative activities of their society. Unlearned compassion need not involve explicit and reflective judgments about who is deserving or undeserving of suffering, but such judgments could come later in development as an agent develops a normative framework for making them. These judgments can then become integrated into the sort of compassion that a virtuous agent feels.

Immordino-Yang and her colleagues (2009) found that compassion for another's social and psychological pain corresponded to somewhat different processes in the brain than compassion for another's physical pain. The former involved high levels of activity in brain areas associated with introspection, reflection on the self, and taking the perspectives of others (Immordino-Yang et al. 2009: 8024). The processing of information also took longer in the case of compassion for social and psychological pain.[5] The implication is that seeing someone as suffering social or psychological pain takes considerable cognitive development and learning. Furthermore, the precise nature of what it is to help someone who is suffering clearly depends on what kind of suffering that person is undergoing. To care for another in the behavioral sense depends on ↳ further learning of how people can suffer in different ways.
p. 113 Both the positive and negative versions of the Confucian "Golden Rule" come to mind as relevant to the task of learning the relevant and more complex forms of psychological and social suffering: "Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not want" (*Analects* 12.2), and "Human-hearted persons establish others in seeking to establish themselves, and promote others in seeking to get there themselves" (*Analects* 6:30, adapted from Ames and Rosemont 1998). Furthermore, the Confucian program of self-cultivation requires study of works such as the *Book of Songs*, as well as accumulated experience in social interaction, that aid in learning the range of human desire and aspiration.

Knowing how others can suffer and what they desire and aspire to, however, is just part of what needs to be acquired for dispositions to respond in the right ways to suffering others. One has to know what weight to accord to these desires and aspirations, especially if there is conflict among several others or with oneself. The fact that others will suffer is not always reason to try to spare them. Confucians believed it right to accord greater weight to the interests of their family than to nonfamily, but how to do this well and adequately protect the interests of nonfamily is often not an easily solved problem (7A35 presents Mengzi's view of what Shun the sage-king would have done had his father murdered a man, and thus when Shun had to balance his duties not to interfere with the Minister of Justice against his duties as a son). Developing compassion into a virtue, therefore, requires the development of good judgment, of *quán* 權, weighing or discretion.

Considerations for acting this way or that way are weighed by the exemplary person. Let us call these considerations "reasons." Reasons for Mengzi are not given by desires but are the features of situations that support acting one way or another. The suffering of another is such a reason. In a virtuous person, the reasons for feeling and acting from compassion are the welfare of the people for whom one is feeling compassion. The reason is not the fact that a virtuous person desires the welfare of these others, because then a person who fails to have that desire has no moral reason to spare others from suffering. For Mengzi and the other early Confucians, one should be trying to shape oneself to become the sort of person who desires the welfare of others: one has a moral reason to shape oneself in that way.

Part of the explanation of why judgments about reasons enter at a developmental stage of the unlearned emotion is that they enter into the apparatus enabling a person to decide on a particular action. One might have an unlearned urge to help, but one has to learn partly from one's culture what avenues of helping there are, and one has to develop reasoning about how to identify which avenues are appropriate given the situation at hand. One must also be prepared to deal with situations in which one must prioritize helping strangers versus helping one's family. To act out of developed compassion is to realize these more sophisticated cognitive abilities. If moral development goes well, a person becomes human hearted, and such a person will know how to care for others. She will be able to balance and identify the relevant priorities in cases of apparent conflict between reasons.

p. 114 Mengzi has a conception of how we can engage in reflection about reasons. Such reflection is based on the aforementioned recognition of recurring patterns. We look for recurring patterns and seek to understand the present situation in terms of patterns we have recognize and found useful in the past (see Wong 2002). When used to make arguments or arrive at decisions about what to do,

analogies do not compel in the way that sound deductive arguments or inferences do. They are often used when we do not know which general principles could be used as major premises of a syllogism, for example, to get a conclusion that would address the problem at hand. Instead, we often have the thought that this present problematic situation looks somewhat like a past situation about which we have more familiarity. But because problematic situations are very complex and possess many characteristics, the resemblance to the past situation will always be partial, and the potentially relevant dissimilarities may give us pause in applying the lessons of the past to the present. As a consequence, analogical argument and inferences often need to be supported through considerable discussion. The threatening dissimilarities need to be dealt with. More similarities need to be marshaled in favor of the analogy. By the time a compelling case is made, the analogy has been considerably enriched and probably qualified.

In addressing moral problems, analogy is usefully employed when the present situation bears resemblance to past situations in which one has made sound judgments about what to do or reacted in sound ways (of course, we don't always make reflective judgments about what to do—sometimes we just act without much thought and get it right). If the past and present are relevantly similar, or perhaps more realistically, similar enough, then we may think about how the judgment made in the past has some relevant analog in the present situation. Note that pattern matching need not be accomplished by consulting some general principle that identifies relevant similarities. Rather, we might directly compare the features of past and present situations and find the relevant features similar enough so that the kind of judgment made in the past is transferable in some way to the present situation. In fact, reflection on relevant patterns instantiated by past and present cases may prompt us to formulate generalizations from which we derive some guidelines or rules of thumb that we could go on to consciously apply in the future.

ii. Motivational Extension and Its Relationship to Cognitive Extension

For compassion to grow into human-heartedness, its motivational directions would have to transform and change so that they become dispositions to respond in the right ways to those who are suffering or in danger of suffering. Development of the motivational component necessitates (but is not identical with) development of the cognitive component.

These points can be illustrated by familiar cases in which one comes to see reason to spare the suffering of certain others. This
p. 115 reason is based on seeing that these others are not so different after all from people one already sees reason to care about. To take ↳ a contemporary example, it is probably no accident that greater acceptance of gays and lesbians in the United States has followed depictions in popular media of sympathetic gay and lesbian characters. These characters could be one's respected teacher, or uncle or brother or daughter, and that has prompted actual teachers, uncles, brothers, and daughters to come out, making it more difficult for those who care about them to think of that group as "them." This case illustrates analogical inference from reasons to respond to suffering of family or of others one has come to love and respect to reasons to respond to the suffering of others, perhaps others that one has formerly despised or at least ignored. To make the analogical inference is not necessarily to commit oneself to a general principle to the effect that we have reason to spare any human being or sentient being suffering. Perhaps some may come to that conclusion based on the more concrete analogical inferences already made to extend the acknowledgment of reasons to such a general extent, but some, perhaps Mengzi, may not want to extend that reason to people who are very far from innocence. The point is that one might be a lot more confident that one has made a sound inference from a particular case in the past to the present situation without knowing what general principle would enable one to make countless other inferences (Wong 2002).

Moral growth involves the intertwining of the motivational and cognitive components of compassion, such that extended discrimination of those who suffer and extended readiness to respond to that suffering are tied together. In a person well on the way to human-heartedness, the feeling of readiness to respond will be integrated with acknowledgment of a reason to respond. This more sophisticated intertwining is frequently not an easy thing to accomplish. One can recognize and accept a reason to spare the suffering of certain others but not be emotionally moved to do so. Indeed, many people might be in that position about gays and lesbians. They might acknowledge that they have reason to respond to their suffering in ways that are similar to the ways they have reason to respond to the suffering of people they care about. They might care about the gays and lesbians who turn out to be their teacher, uncle, brother, or daughter but remain uncaring about gays and lesbians who are strangers or mere acquaintances. The cognitive component is unaccompanied by the motivational and feeling components.

It might be argued that analogical inference can lead to change in one's motivations given concern about cognitive dissonance (Nivison 1980 interprets Mengzi as making this sort of argument in 1A7 but is appropriately skeptical about the effectiveness of such an argument). There are some people who are very concerned about the cognitive dissonance that arises among their beliefs and perceptions, and that may lead to their feeling compassion toward others for whom they have previously not felt it. But many of us are not necessarily concerned above all else to eliminate cognitive dissonance. Many times we put up with it very well. Even if we are very concerned with cognitive dissonance, we might choose to go in the "wrong" direction of retracting the warrant for feeling compassion in the past situation (maybe one's teacher is not so respectable after all, if she is lesbian). Whether one comes to extend compassion, then, can start with coming to see relevant similarities one hadn't seen before, but that is not a sufficient condition.

p. 116 Given the drawbacks of strategies that attempt to use analogical inference to persuade someone to be more compassionate out of the concern for consistency, we must ask whether analogical inference can play some other kind of role in promoting compassion as a motivational or visceral component. The passage in the *Mengzi* that is most relevant to this question contains the 1A7 story of Mengzi's conversation with King Xuan about the time he spared the ox from ritual slaughter. In the course of trying to persuade King Xuan that he could become a true king who could bring peace to his people, Mengzi asks the king whether it was true that he had spared an ox being led to ritual slaughter. In recalling the event, the king professes some uncertainty as to what his motives were but is persuaded by Mengzi that he was moved by compassion for the ox. Its trembling reminded him, the king recalls, of an innocent man going to his execution. Mengzi concludes that the king fails to bring peace to his people not because of any inability to act but because of a simple failure to act. All that the king has to do, Mengzi explains, is to take the compassion he has applied to the ox and apply it to his own people.

There has been quite a bit of debate over the question of how Mengzi might have thought about what he was trying to do with the king. The passage itself does not provide definitive evidence. When it is combined with other things Mengzi says about moral development, however, the passage is greatly useful as a stimulus for articulating a psychologically realistic picture of moral growth that is in the Mengzian spirit. The passage, after all, is a plausible description of how one might try to encourage someone to expand the scope of his compassion, especially if the context is the king just having asked whether he could be the kind of king Mengzi is urging him to be: one who could draw people to him because of the way he treats them rather than one who forces their submission by inciting fear. It would make sense in that context to ask whether it was true that he had spared the ox. This is reminding the king of a capacity he has that would draw his people to him if he extends it to them. In this passage, the analogies that Mengzi presses on King Xuan appear crucial for what Mengzi is trying to do, but it is not the obvious role we might expect. He is not trying to motivate the king out of a concern for consistency, or at least, this interpretation doesn't give Mengzi a very promising strategy for persuading the king, precisely for the reasons outlined earlier. His primary aim is probably not even to get the king to recognize that he has a moral reason to spare his people suffering. The king probably already knew that, at least intellectually. Mengzi is trying to get the king to care about that.

To motivate another interpretation of what Mengzi might be trying to do with the king, let me turn to a claim that Clore and Ortony (2000) make about two ways in which an object can acquire emotional meaning for a person. One way is through conscious "direct computation" of the meaning of the object. For example, one overhears belittling remarks uttered by a work colleague about oneself. One reacts by thinking that one has done nothing to deserve these remarks and becomes angry and hurt. The other way that an object can acquire emotional meaning is "reinstatement." A work colleague physically resembles a merciless bully from one's childhood. One is frequently provoked by apparently innocent remarks by this colleague. Reinstatement is frequently nonconscious and is based
p. 117 on resemblance between features of the past situation that provoked the ↳ emotion and those of the present situation. If the association between the two situations is nonconscious, this can be a serious barrier to self-understanding of why one is presently feeling a certain way, and if the evocative point of resemblance does not warrant the present feeling, we have a paradigm case of unwarranted emotion. For example, the fact that one's work colleague has curly red hair like the bully in the past is not a good reason to feel the way one is feeling. Clore and Ortony emphasize the nonconscious and frequently unwarranted nature of reinstated emotion.

However, reacting to the present on the basis of resemblance to a past situation can be warranted and/or a conscious matter. One might with surprise find oneself reacting with compassion to the suffering of a gay or lesbian person. But one's feelings of compassion might convey that one has come to see them in a different way, perhaps as having the same concerns and qualities as people with whom one has identified and felt compassion for in the past. The perception of relevant similarity and the other

components of the emotion may come along before one becomes consciously aware of how one's views have changed and the way the change has affected one's emotional dispositions.

King Xuan's reaction to the ox was, in Clore and Ortony's terms, a "reinstated emotion" based on resemblance to an innocent man going to his execution. So, he spared the ox, but the king also thought the ritual had to go on and so substituted a sheep. Does this mean he was mistaken to have spared the ox? It is significant that Xuan was not sure what his motives were for sparing the ox. He might have been confused by his own actions of first sparing the ox and then substituting a sheep so that the ritual ceremony could go on. Mengzi in effect supplies the king with an explanation: he could not bear the ox's suffering having seen it, but (as Mengzi himself believes) the ritual takes precedence over the ox's suffering. And that is the reason why it was right to substitute the sheep. This does not mean that he was wrong to spare the ox once having seen its suffering. This is what an exemplary person would do, says Mengzi. And that is why the exemplary person stays away from the kitchen (7A45: the exemplary person loves animals but is not human hearted toward them). The suggestion here is that an exemplary person nurtures their compassion, even when in general they should avoid engaging potential objects of their compassion when they have weightier reasons not to spare them.

The analogy from sparing the innocent man to sparing the ox is a sound one in Mengzi's view, and so is the analogy from sparing the ox to sparing the people. In fact, the king has far greater reason to spare his people. But as noted earlier, the point of pressing this analogy was not to teach the king some new moral knowledge. He probably already knew that he had a moral reason to spare his people. The point was to start with a case in which the king had felt compassion for another being's suffering and to have him recall it and to relive it. Mengzi is trying to get the king to consciously reinstate his emotion of compassion through reflection on the analogies from the suffering of the innocent man to the suffering of the ox to the suffering of the people. He is reflecting on and reliving what he felt for the innocent man and the ox, and Mengzi is hoping to get that feeling, the bodily readiness to respond and the motivational inclination, to flow to the king's people (see Wong 2015a, 2015b, and 2023).

So rather than trying to teach the king anything new in reminding him that he has a reason to spare his people, Mengzi is trying to get the king to *feel* the reason to spare his people. I have stressed that reasons are not based on what the agent desires. They are situational features that make it right and appropriate for an agent to do certain things. But even though recognizing the existence of reasons in this sense is not grounded in motivational inclinations, a motivationally efficacious recognition depends on these inclinations. The king may know intellectually that he ought to be caring for the needs of his people. In this sense he knows that their suffering is a reason for him to change his policies. But Mengzi is trying to make this recognition motivationally efficacious. Recall that the mind itself is not a separate agential entity pulling the levers that control vital energies (like a Cartesian mind manipulating the pineal gland) but is composed of vital energies itself and therefore must draw from at least some of the unlearned motivational directions of vital energies in forming and executing its aims. This dependence is plausibly the lesson of the parable of the man from Song in 2A2, who tries to "help" his seedlings to grow by pulling on them. He harms them by trying to force their growth without regard to their internal readiness to grow. On the other hand, Mengzi believes it is a grave mistake to neglect the sprouts and in particular not to weed among them. This connects with the 6A14 reference to the need to nurture the greater parts of the self rather than the smaller parts. One must nurture the ethical directions of vital energies that are embedded in the sprouts, but nurturing them involves taking advantage of the directional momentum already embodied the flow of vital energies that constitutes manifestations of the sprouts. Acknowledging what one has reason to do will help, but such acknowledgment will only help if it becomes married to the given motivational force of vital energies that comes with the sprouts.

The relevant kind of analogical inference does not just transmit sound judgment and response to past situations along the lines of relevant similarity to sound judgment and response in present situations. In the right circumstances, it can transmit the motivational force of vital energies along those lines of relevant similarity. Thus, the "base" cases of sound judgment in past situations from which sound analogies are drawn must also be cases in which one was moved appropriately by emotion. To understand how this can happen in a Mengzian picture of the way that analogical reflection and reinstated emotion can intertwine in such a way as to extend the motivational component of emotion, we must go back to the pleasure and avoidance of pain that comes from acting on our inborn likings and dislikings. The bodily readiness to respond, and in general the forms of likings and dislikings that constitute the motivational component of emotion, can grow along analogical directions, along the lines of relevant similarity. When we have wanted something *x*, and if in satisfying that desire we gain satisfaction, we look for other things that are like *x*. To take the most primordial cases, when we seek something to quench our thirst and succeed in finding something that provides gratification, we look for things that are similar. When we seek food to satisfy hunger, and find something that gratifies the hunger, we look for similar

p. 119 things. This is one of our most basic and adaptive dispositions. It is so important that we have nonconscious and fast ways of ↳ detecting the relevant similarities, but our consciousness provides slower and reflective means of examining or reconsidering relevant similarities.

A crucial part of this story is that we find gratification in the object that our desire leads us to pursue. This is not always the case. Sometimes we are profoundly disappointed in pursuing something that we think will gratify. If compassion has the possibility of growing along the lines I have suggested, then, satisfying the desire to spare others from suffering must be felt as gratifying. We must have built into us a disposition to find gratification in the object that our compassionate concern leads us to pursue, such that we look for similar objects. Mengzi was confident that this is built into our nature, and this is what he meant when he said in 2A6 that acting on our sprouts on knowing how to fill out the sprouts as like a fire starting up or a spring breaking through a hole in the ground. Acting on them gives us pleasure, which in turn spurs us on to find relevantly similar opportunities to do more.

Mengzi might have been right. We might indeed have biological dispositions to want and to find pleasure in responding to the needs of others. Mengzi's insight into how desire expands and grows in its objects is extremely important and points to an alternative way to think about how reflection and emotion and desire interact so as to produce new motivation (see Wong 2017). The Kantian tradition only gives us a rather impoverished version of a reified entity of reason generating its own motivation apart from the inclinations that drive our lives as social animals. The Humean tradition has tended to promote an instrumental view of how desires change in their scope or how new desires get generated. Changing or new desires result from existing desires, with reason providing relevant information: sometimes we desire new things as means to satisfying desires we already have; sometimes new desires get generated as more specific forms of a more general desire, such as the desire for something fabulous to garner my neighbor's admiration, leading to the desire for a Porsche or for a swimming pool.

The alternative Mengzian conception of desire as growing along analogical lines is plausible in an evolutionary framework, but it is also plausible from observation of the human psychic economy. It is a familiar phenomenon that we often don't know what we want and that we must engage with the world to get more knowledge of that. We have basic desires and aversions, likings and dislikings for certain things, but if we are lucky these only assure our immediate survival. To know what else we want, we must explore other things in the world, and one's adaptive mechanism for doing so is starting with what has gratified us in the past. It need not be exactly the same, but only relevantly similar. But we must go and seek these out. It follows that if we are not enabled and encouraged to explore the satisfactions of compassionate and caring relationship with others, then we may never strongly and consistently come to desire such relationship but remain stuck in the incipient and inconstant desires someone like King Xuan has.

In this Mengzian conception of the moral growth of compassion, moral teaching and learning interact with the unlearned form of compassion. Analogical inference may play a role in generating new moral knowledge. But in addition, extension of the motivational components to cases where moral knowledge points it is not assured. Mengzi seemed to envision a strategy of teaching
p. 120 in which the learner is prompted to experience ↳ compassion again in conjunction with being presented with a new and appropriate object for its motivational component.

Moral knowledge can grow through analogical inference, and so can desire. The double role of analogy is appropriate to the foundational role of pattern recognition in human response to the world. The two kinds of analogical processes are parallel. However, they are not the same because desire does not grow from the necessity to be logically consistent but from what one wants and has found gratifying in the past to what is relevantly like what one wants. There is no compulsion from logic for desire to move in this way. Nevertheless, the two processes both operate in the moral growth of compassion. The trick is to get analogical growth of the feeling, the visceral and motivational components to interact with analogical growth of the cognitive component.

There is a striking resonance with this Mengzian picture from some recent psychological theorizing on empathy and ethical development. The psychologist Martin Hoffman (2000) has suggested that a child begins to internalize morality when they experience empathic distress upon witnessing another person's distress. The earliest modes of empathic arousal are primitive, automatic, and involuntary processes. Hoffman thinks that the most effective childrearing takes advantage of occasions when primitive empathy is aroused and used in moral teaching. A child hurts another, for example, and an adult might arouse empathy in the perpetrator by pointing out the effect on the victim, expressing disapproval, and suggesting apology or reparation. When such a sequence is repeated many times, "scripts" are created and encoded in memory so that they influence later decisions and behavior. It

is important that the kind of induction that presents moral reasons to the child be given in an emotionally evocative situation so that the cognition of what the child is being taught can be made "hot" by the activation of affective and motivational proclivities and by the linking of the proclivities to the reasons.

In Mengzian terms, the primal empathic proclivities to which Hoffman points are part of the sprout of compassion. The sort of teaching that parents do with their children in the context of activated empathy for another who is suffering corresponds to the sort of teaching Mengzi was trying to do with the king. Mengzi is trying to embed a conception of what a true king does for his people in the king's emotional proclivities for compassion, such that this conception becomes emotionally charged and gains motivational efficacy. At the same time, the compassion is appropriately enlarged by getting the king to use his mind to reflect on what is right and appropriate for him to do as a king.

The anthropologist Naomi Quinn (2005) identifies one cross-cultural universal of child rearing as the linking of moral lessons with emotional arousal, so as to make the lessons unmistakable, memorable, and motivating. In her discussion of Chinese childrearing, for example, Quinn identifies the practice of shaming as an instrument for bringing home a moral lesson to a child while emotionally arousing them. There is even a hint of shaming when Mengzi tells Xuan in something of a scolding tone that for the king to say his kindness can reach to the birds and beasts but that he cannot bring benefits to his people is like saying he is strong enough to lift 500 pounds but not enough to lift a single feather.

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V. How Moral Development is Relational and over a Lifetime in the *Mengzi*

What we get from Mengzi, then, is an extremely subtle picture of the way that moral development can emerge from directed reflection while in the midst of feeling, a reflection that can guide the feeling to new places where it ought to go. At the same time, the feeling's being guided by the reflection imparts motivational energy to the reflection. This interaction of feeling and reflection in the development of character in Confucianism must ultimately place someone like King Xuan at the center of efforts to improve his character. He must take responsibility for his own cultivation. But in Mengzi's relational view of human affairs, this is not incompatible with receiving crucial mentoring and other kinds of prompting the individual to recognize his responsibility and helping him to discharge it. Mengzi nudges King Xuan to engage in reflection, to relive his compassion for the ox and to transfer it to his people.

Besides the kind of advising and mentoring that Mengzi did with King Xuan, others can spur self-cultivation if they are exemplars who inspire and from whom one can learn. Both the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* seem to assume that the very ideal of an exemplary person has magnetic power. The Immordino-Yang study of people who are told stories designed to evoke their admiration and compassion provides some striking confirmation of this idea. Immordino-Yang and her colleagues interviewed experiment participants to get self-reports about what they were feeling and thinking as a result of being told true stories about other people that elicited admiration or compassion. From the content of the interviews and from the finding that there was a high level of brain activity in areas of the brain associated with a feeling of self and interoceptive information from visceral sensation and regulation, they speculated that their grappling with the import of the stories evoked strong visceral reactions (in Chinese terms, the feeling of one's vital energies stirring), the felt experience of which then prompted them to reflect on the meaning of these stories for themselves and their own moral standing. One person, who reacted to a story about a mother and young son who made sacrifices for each other, described a "balloon or something just under [his] sternum, inflating and moving up and out." This made the participant think about how he had not thanked his own parents enough for their sacrifices (Immordino-Yang 2011: 313–14). Another experiment participant reported her reaction to a story meant to induce admiration for moral virtue as becoming "more sensitive to the temperature inside you … a visceral reaction that feels like an emotional alertness" and making her want to spend a year or two dedicated to the story protagonist's cause (Immordino-Yang 2011: 314). In the Confucian program of self-cultivation, "true" stories about historical leaders of the past seemed to have served the same function as stimuli for self-reflection and self-evaluation. We

p. 122 may see the participants in Immordino-Yang's study as engaging in Mengzian reflection ↳ on the manifestation of their sprouts, beginning with feeling their vital energies stir in response.

Mengzi's attempt to launch King Xuan into this kind of self-cultivation illustrates another striking feature of his conception of moral development that holds for the Confucians generally: the moral self-cultivation is a lifelong project, as indicated by Confucius's remark in *Analects* 2.4 that he was able at the age of 70 to give his mind free rein and not overstep the boundaries. Looking to the Confucian tradition of thought on moral development, then, very quickly prompts us refocus our chronological view of moral development (see Wong 2015a). Consider how much the Western literature on moral development focuses on children up to, perhaps, young adulthood. The far longer time frame in the Confucian texts connects with a debate in contemporary personality theory as to whether personality is relatively fixed past a certain age. Under theories that personality traits arise from biological causes on the model of something like Mengzi's metaphor of water flowing downward, traits reach full maturity in early adulthood with little or no change afterward (McCrae and Costa 1996). Theories that emphasize development more along the lines of Mengzi's sprout metaphor, as arising from interaction between contextual factors and biology, are more congenial to the idea of plasticity throughout the life span (Haan, Millsap, and Hartka 1986; Helson, Jones, and Kwan 2002).

For example, the major life changes that occur in early and middle adulthood could constitute important contextual factors that play a role in personality change. Acquiring a job or a profession and taking on more responsibility significantly increase conscientiousness (one of the "Big Five" personality traits) well into middle adulthood. Marrying or partnering and having children are plausibly linked to increases in not only conscientiousness but also the trait of agreeableness (another of the Big Five). In some theories, people get better at regulating their own emotions as they get older and could decline in the levels of neuroticism (a third trait of the Big Five). There could be several processes by which biology and contextual factors interact. Biological dispositions toward the development of conscientiousness could prompt people to seek out roles and relationships that require greater responsibility, but conversely, new responsibilities and relationship commitments may require people to become more responsible. Plausibly, both processes could take place in an interactive way: personality changes may lead people to select and shape environments that reinforce those changes (Caspi and Roberts 1999). A study of managers in business organizations shows that even in the later stages of their careers, they continue to pick out role models, identify desirable attributes and skills possessed by these models, and learn from them (Gibson 2003).[6]

VI. Xunzi's Criticisms of Mengzi on Human Nature as a Basis for Moral Self-Cultivation

The discussion so far has supported Mengzi's high and influential place in the Confucian tradition as fully deserved and, moreover,
p. 123 that those outside the tradition have good ↳ reason to pay attention to what he says about human nature and moral development. But it did not take long for another Confucian to rise up and challenge Mengzi and to present a formidable alternative. In Chapter 23, "性惡 *Xing e*," Xunzi asserts that far from being good (*shàn* 善), human beings have a nature that is *e* 惡 or bad, because their nature contains a love of profit, envy and hatred, and desires of the eyes and ears that lead to violence and anarchy (translation of 23.1a, Knoblock 1994: 151; Hutton 2014: 248). To avoid these consequences of indulging our spontaneous desires and impulses, it takes conscious activity, deliberate effort (*wěi* 偽), models and teaching, guidance by observing ritual propriety, and *yì* 義 or rightness (translation of 23.1b, Knoblock 1994: 151; Hutton 2014: 249), and their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort. All rituals and standards of righteousness are generated or produced (*shēng* 生) by the sages (translation of 23.1c, Knoblock 1994: 152; Hutton 2014: 249). To convey the kind of transformation required, Xunzi uses craft metaphors such as steaming a piece of warped wood and then straightening it on a press frame (translation of 23.3b–3c, Knoblock 1994: 156–57) and a potter molding a dish from clay (translation of 23.4a, Knoblock 1994: 157; Hutton 2014: 253).

Xunzi explicitly confronts Mengzi's view on human nature in four places, but what he says leaves unclear how he actually disagrees with it. In the first place (translation of 23.1c, Knoblock 1994: 152; Hutton 2014: 249), he states Mengzi's view as "People engaging in learning shows their nature to be good (人之學者， 其性善)." Xunzi goes on to argue that this view demonstrates an absence of understanding of what nature is, as opposed to what is acquired. Nature is what comes from *Tian* 天, is not learned, and cannot be worked at. In the second place, Xunzi states Mengzi's view as "Human nature is good, but people wind up losing their nature and original state (今人之性善，將皆失喪其性故也; *Xunzi* 23; Hutton 2014: 249)." Xunzi's response is to argue that out of necessity, we begin to lose the state of childlike simplicity immediately after birth. It could even be said it *is* our nature to lose this simplicity, and given the bad condition that people end up with, we could say, as a reductio of Mengzi's position, that human nature is *bad*. In

the third place, Xunzi repeats the "Human nature is good" formulation of Mengzi's view and takes it as obvious that this cannot be true because if it were there would be no need for sage-kings, ritual, and rightness (translation of 23.3a–b, Knoblock 1994: 155–56; Hutton 2014: 251). In the fourth place, Xunzi argues that the "Human nature is good" formulation does not stand up to the test of implementing and practicing it. If it were true, one could dispense with sage-kings and set aside rituals and standards of rightness, and all would be well.

One might read these criticisms as reflecting either a misunderstanding or deliberate misrepresentation of Mengzi's views by Xunzi. After all, the dispositions that Mengzi takes to be the beginnings of morality are taken to be inborn and things given by Heaven that human beings do not have to learn or work at having. Of course, when Mengzi is thinking along the lines of the sprout metaphor, he acknowledges the necessity of learning and working at *extending* the dispositions to acquire the virtues in their realized states. But Xunzi, it seems, should have acknowledged the necessity of learning and effort as a fundamental similarity between his and Mengzi's views, rather than using it as a rhetorical weapon against Mengzi.

But this is where the ambiguity in Mengzi's views might have played a critical role in Xunzi's interpretation. The water metaphor
p. 124 encourages the idea that development ↳ into fully realized goodness is the default condition of human beings, and that it takes interference with that condition for human beings to become bad. Notice that in the second place where Xunzi attacks Mengzi's view, the language of losing one's original nature is used to characterize that view, a language that is much more consistent with the implications of the water rather than the sprout metaphor. Thus, on the point where Xunzi most obviously criticizes Mengzi, the point that acquiring the virtues takes learning and effort, Xunzi is partly right and partly wrong. In fact, an advantage of realizing the ambiguity in Mengzi's view that is expressed by the difference between the water and sprout metaphor is that it makes a lot better sense of why Xunzi so vehemently criticized Mengzi.

VII. Does Xunzi Disagree with Mengzi on the Motivational Content of Human Nature?

Having noted this, the critical question now becomes "If we take the sprout metaphor as representing Mengzi's more plausible conception of human nature and moral development, do important disagreements remain between him and Xunzi?" It might be thought that an important disagreement lies in the motivational content that Xunzi and Mengzi assign to human nature. Mengzi identifies sprouts such as compassion, shame and dislike, deference, and intuitive approval and disapproval, whereas Xunzi identifies the unlovely desires and emotions that cause disorder and conflict. But here too the matter becomes more complex upon further investigation.

i. Did Mengzi Acknowledge That *Xing* Contains Sensual Dispositions?

Like Xunzi, Mengzi did acknowledge inborn desires and emotions that could lead to trouble. In 6A14, Mengzi says that there is a smaller and greater part of the self. The greater part clearly lies in the sprouts and the human capacity to reflect on and to nourish them. People nourish their smaller parts when they give themselves over to drinking and eating. In 6A10, Mengzi holds that the sprout of righteousness can prompt us to refuse food offered with abuse, even if we may die without it, but we are still capable of improperly accepting a big salary in order to acquire a big mansion or the service of wives and concubines or the fawning approval of poor acquaintances. Even though Mengzi does not declare that our *xing* is mixed in its potential for good or ill, it seems to follow from his view that it is so mixed.

p. 125 The one place where he explains why he does not declare that *xing* is mixed is revealing. In 7B24, he says,

> The responses of the mouth to flavors, of the eye to colors, of the ear to sounds, of the nose to fragrances, and of the four limbs to comfort are our nature [*xing*]. But there is destiny [命*ming*] in them, and the noble person does not call them "nature" ["*xing*"]. Humaneness between parent and child, rightness between ruler and minister, propriety between guest and host, wisdom for the worthy, and the Way of Heaven for the sage are destiny [*ming*]. But our nature [*xing*] is in them, and the noble person does not call them "destiny" ["*ming*"]. (Bloom 2009: 161)

The first thing to note about this passage is that it is fully compatible with Mengzi granting that dispositions to seek after sensual satisfaction are part of our nature in the sense of being inborn. When he says that there is destiny in them, he may be saying one of two things, or not distinguishing between two things: first, that their satisfaction is not fully under our control (something's being *ming* can have that meaning for Mengzi); second, that normative constraints apply to how the senses should be satisfied (something's being *ming* can have the meaning of concerning Heaven's decree, what should happen). If "destiny" has the descriptive meaning, Mengzi could be saying in the first half of the passage that even though our sensual dispositions are part of our nature in the ordinary sense, the exemplary or noble person (*jūnzǐ* 君子) chooses to view them as destiny because their satisfaction is not fully under one's control, and, perhaps, also because to call something part of one's nature is often to use it as an excuse to pursue their satisfaction (see Shun 1997: 204). If "destiny" has the normative meaning in the passage, Mengzi might be saying that the exemplary person keeps foremost in mind that there are normative constraints on how we satisfy our sensual dispositions and avoids thinking of their being part of our nature as an excuse to unrestrainedly pursue their satisfaction.

In the second half of the passage, if "destiny" has the descriptive meaning, Mengzi is saying that the full realization of the virtues is not fully under one's control, but the exemplary person chooses not to think of them in this way because the virtues involve dispositions that are fully under one's control to *try* to realize. By thinking of them as part of one's nature, the exemplary person may be spurring themself to keep striving to the utmost to realize them. If "destiny" has the normative meaning, perhaps Mengzi is saying that the exemplary person does not regard the realization of the moral dispositions as further required by normative constraints since the normativity is already embedded within the dispositions. And again, the exemplary person thinks of them as part of their nature as a spur to realizing them. As can be seen, the passage is highly ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations, but what emerges is that Mengzi's choice of what to call "nature" may be influenced by his decision as to what kind of stance to take toward the moral dispositions as compared with the stance to take toward the sensual dispositions. He does not think he needs to encourage
p. 126 people to satisfy their sensual dispositions, but he does think he needs to encourage them to ↳ satisfy their moral dispositions. His rhetorical choice of what to call "destiny" and what to call "nature" seems to be bound up with this practical purpose. But if we abstract from this practical purpose and stick with the meaning of "nature" as defined here—inborn dispositions that are typical or characteristic of human beings—it is fully plausible to attribute to Mengzi the view that human nature is mixed, containing not only moral dispositions but sensual dispositions that may lead away from moral development if they become the focus of attention.

ii. Did Xunzi Acknowledge Impulses That Were Congenial to Morality?

And what about Xunzi? From the "Human nature is bad" chapter, it looks as if he might only acknowledge sensual desires and emotions and other self-regarding desires for gain as part of (human's) nature. But here the situation again is more complex than might at first be thought. The complexity begins to come into view when one considers from Xunzi's point of view the magnitude of the problem that requires a change in human psychology. As has been pointed out by a number of commentators, Xunzi seems quite well aware of the difficulties in creating enough trust so that people will feel confident enough to abide by the rules that sustain the social order (Van Norden 1992; Wong 1996; Goldin 1999). Even though they know that this social order will save everyone from the competition and conflict that results if everyone acts on unrestrained self-interest, they may always be tempted to "free-ride" on other people's compliance to the rules and cheat when they can get away with it. Or they may have no initial thought of cheating, but are aware that others may, and will be tempted to strike first. Given that everyone can have such thoughts, the question of how to generate enough trust to promote widespread compliance with the rules becomes a compelling problem. In the Western tradition, Hobbes held that that the answer to this problem was for all individuals to agree to a common power that could, through threat of punishment, make it clearly disadvantageous to try to cheat on the rules. The problems with this solution are well discussed. The common power must be exercised by human beings who are as subject to the temptations to free-ride as much as anyone else. Moreover, the power to detect and punish with intimidating certainty is either unrealistic to expect or if achieved detracts from the value of the social order it is supposed to support.

Xunzi has a sophisticated and arguably more plausible solution than Hobbes offered. There must be a psychological transformation that renders individuals trustworthy. At one point, Xunzi makes a very striking claim about the nature of the change one must undergo in order to become trustworthy:

> Who understands that risking death in carrying out a commission is how an officer cares for his life? Who understands that producing and supplying goods are how to nurture resources? Who knows that reverence and courtesy are how to
p. 127 nurture his ↳ security? Who knows that acting in accordance with ritual and moral principles and observing good form and reason are how to nurture his emotions?
>
> Accordingly, if one acts with only the preservation of his own life in view, death is inevitable. If one acts with only profit in mind, loss is certain. If one is indolent and timorous, thinking thereby he will be safe, danger is certain. If he seeks happiness through self-gratification, destruction is certain. (translation of 19.1d, Knoblock 1994: 56)

Note that Xunzi is saying not only that *acting* in ways that apparently disregard one's own welfare is actually to promote one's welfare, but also that one must be *genuinely willing* to forgo advantage for oneself in order to be a trustworthy partner in cooperation and therefore in order to benefit from cooperation.

The *junzi*, the exemplary person or gentleman who is a realization of moral excellence, embodies this willingness to forgo advantage for oneself: "power and profit cannot sway him, the masses cannot shift him, and nothing in the world can shake him" (Hutton 2014: 8). How did Xunzi envision this remarkable transformation from the human condition as he has described it in the "Human nature is bad" chapter? Some scholars have focused on the power of the mind in Xunzi's theory to approve or disapprove of acting on one's desires and emotions (Van Norden 1992). If the mind deems it impermissible (*bù kě* 不可) to act on a desire or an emotion, it can stop action; if desires are not strong enough to motivate action, the mind's approval of action may suffice to motivate. Through the mind's approval and disapproval, desires may be controlled and moderated.

Aaron Stalnaker emphasizes the way in which Xunzi incorporates the influence of Zhuangzi 莊子 and the Vital Energies Inner Cultivation tradition. Stalnaker argues that this influence must be included within our understanding of how the mind correctly arrives at its judgments of approval and disapproval. In the "Undoing Fixation (*jiebi* 解蔽)" chapter, Xunzi says three capacities of mind need to be cultivated to apprehend the *Dao* (here I adopt Stalnaker's translations and explanations of the key terms): emptiness (*xū* 虛), unity (*yī* 壹), and tranquility (*jìng* 靜). Emptiness is being receptive to new impressions and thoughts and keeping memories and preconceptions from interfering with this receptivity; unity is bringing all one's diverse impressions and ideas into harmonious interrelation without allowing some to obscure others; and tranquility is remaining calm and alert without being "swept away" by its many thoughts and perceptions and yet without having to rely on becoming inactive or withdrawing from thought, stimulation, or even "irritation" (characterizations from Stalnaker 2003: 90–91). As Stalnaker points out, Xunzi is likely to have been influenced by Zhuangzi's conception of emptiness, which also connotes a supreme receptiveness and responsiveness to the world. Where Zhuangzi uses the metaphor of the heart-mind as mirror to convey the idea of supreme responsiveness (Chapter 7), not obscuring or distorting what it reflects, Xunzi uses the image of a pan of water, which if set straight and not moved will be clear and bright on top and clearly reflect one's face (Chapter 21, "Undoing Fixation"). As Stalnaker points out, Xunzi has subtly altered the meaning of
p. 128 emptiness. While ↳ Zhuangzi says that the mirroring mind responds but does not store, Xunzi's mind stores without prejudice at the same time it responds correctly (Stalnaker 2003: 92).

Stalnaker sees influence from the Vital Energies Inner Cultivation tradition (including the *Neiye* 內業, the *Xinshu* 心術, both *Shang* 上 and *Xia* 下) primarily in Xunzi's concepts of unity and tranquility. In the Vital Energies Inner Cultivation tradition, meditative breathing practices are utilized to dissolve one's emotional responses to things and to see the underlying unity of all things. Here again, however, Stalnaker sees Xunzi to be adapting the Daoist concepts to his own Confucian purposes, where the underlying unity is the Confucian Dao, conceived as a normative order. As Stalnaker observes, Xunzi holds that it takes a long time to develop these capacities of the heart-mind, and Xunzi draws upon them to fill in the gap between the inborn dispositions of human nature, especially as he characterizes them in the "Human Nature Is Bad" chapter, and the self-cultivation required to escape the destructive conflict that would come from indulging those dispositions.

Without "emptiness" no one could learn about different ways of existence, about more refined and constructive choices and modes of satisfaction. Without "unity" no one could understand complex phenomena, whether social or natural, nor could anyone deliberate effectively on practical matters with distant consequences, nor could one focus sufficiently on the Confucian Way to succeed in remaking one's innate impulses in a more suitable, sagely form. Without "tranquility" no one could get sufficiently beyond the tugs

of desire and emotion to step back and approve disciplined plans of action, nor could anyone quiet the fears and hopes raised by our minds' tendencies to dream and plan. (Stalnaker 2003: 108).

Stalnaker contributes to a greater understanding of how Xunzi might have understood the transformation process. Nevertheless, emptiness, unity, and tranquility only cover part of the process that can be inferred from other textual passages in the *Xunzi*. These qualities make possible greater clarity of vision, but it's not clear what motivations are marshaled in favor of the required moral transformation. In what follows, I point to ways in which Xunzian transformation involves expression of natural and compelling emotions and yearnings, especially in periods of grief and mourning, and furthermore involves realization that human beings attain the greatest possible satisfaction of their desires by following the Way.

iii. Expression of Natural and Compelling Emotions and Yearnings

Given the emphasis Xunzi gives to observing ritual propriety in reforming human nature, one would expect the use of rituals primarily to be restraint of the self-seeking motivations of human nature. However, in the chapter on ritual, and in the course of discussing their place in human life, Xunzi adopts a very different tone. As a general principle, he says, ritual provides ornamentation for expressions of joy at birth, and in sending off the dead it provides ornamentation for expressions of grief (translation of ↳ 19.7b, Knoblock 1994: 68; Hutton 2014: 211). Xunzi goes on to say that all creatures between Heaven and Earth
p. 129 that have blood and breath are also certain to possess awareness, and that those with awareness love their own kind. Among the larger animals, if one loses its mate, then it displays signs of distress. And since humans have the most awareness, their feeling for their parents is bound to be the greatest. This is said to prepare the explanation of why rituals of mourning have to be of certain form and sufficient length to give expression to the duration and intensity of grief for the death of parents. The implication of the continuity between human beings and other animals in their love of their own kind is clear: the love is not acquired or learned but is unlearned and inborn.

I have argued (Wong 1996) that this invocation of love of one's kind and grief for one's parents is crucial for making Xunzi's ability to give a coherent and plausible explanation of how the mind is able to craft a new self. If the original endowment of human beings were nothing but self-regarding motivations, it would be mysterious how a human being could get to the point of wholeheartedly living and dying by the Way. To conclude that it is in one's rational self-interest to acquire motivations that make one a trustworthy partner in cooperation is not to enable oneself to have those motivations, especially if those motivations involve a willingness to forego advantage for oneself. The only way that such a motivation could be acquired is if some of it, at least in primitive form, is already there.

Consider an extension of Xunzi's craft metaphor. Xunzi does not explicitly articulate this metaphor, but it makes sense of how he conceives the details of crafting a moral self. When crafting a vessel from a lump of clay, the potter imparts to it qualities that it did not have originally. At the same time however, the way in which she works with it depends on its original structural properties. The properties of the clay determine the range of firing temperatures the potter can use, for example, or how thick she can make the walls of the vessel. In the chapter on ritual, Xunzi is in effect describing the way in which the moral craftsman relies on certain properties of human psychology—the love of one's parents and grief over one's loss of them—and works on them with his tools of ritual to give expression to them and strengthen them.

The craft metaphor can even be extended a bit further: not only must the *wei* or deliberate activity take into account the properties of the original material, but *the tools* used must be suited to the material. This is virtually what Xunzi is saying about the appropriate form for mourning rituals: the mourning period for parents must extend into the third year because of the natural emotions involved (translation of 19.9c, Knoblock 1994: 70; Hutton 2014: 212). Xunzi says the length was established to be equal to the emotions involved: "The greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals" (translation of 19.9a, Knoblock 1994: 69). Though Xunzi is not compelling when he insists that natural emotion dictates such a precise mourning period for parents, the underlying idea is plausible. Emotions and desires cannot simply be repressed or their expression in action simply held in check by the mind's capacity for approval and disapproval. Rather, they must be given, under the direction of the mind, an
p. 130 appropriate measure of satisfaction and expressed in socially beneficial ways. Rituals ↳ that "fit" the love one feels for parents and the intensity and duration of one's grief upon losing them give expression to and strengthen the dispositions to have these emotions

more consistently. That is why rituals have to take a certain form to do the job they were meant to do. The moral craftsman must shape and select the tools he uses to fit the material he works on.

But how, more specifically, are emotions such as love of one's parents strengthened? The Confucian conception of ritual activity as a form of self-cultivation emphasizes that one must be emotionally present to the moral meaning of the ceremony. In his discussion of the way that rituals must be configured as tools for working with our emotions, Xunzi shows keen insight into the way that emotions are influenced by what we are prompted to pay attention to. Rituals can prompt us to focus attention on relevant features of the situation so as to strengthen and direct our emotional lives. They can be a form of meditation on the meaning of relationship and community in the midst of enacting them with other participants in the ritual. Xunzi's description of the proper form of rites of mourning illustrates this idea of disciplining and focusing attention. Preparation of the body, he says, should prevent its being "hideous" so that the mourner can keep in mind duties of grief and respect for the person who has been lost. Over the course of mourning, the body is progressively moved farther away so that one's attention gradually returns to the ordinary course of life whereby one cares for the needs of the living (translation of 19.5a, Knoblock 1994: 64–55; Hutton 2014: 208–9). The ritual configured in this way helps one focus properly on the dead and to meditate on their importance while helping one in the transition to caring once again for the needs of the living. Xunzi praises the village wine ceremony in which each takes a drink from the same cup but in order of their seniority because "in this way we know that it is possible for junior and senior to drink together without anyone being left out." The ceremony enables participants to be "content and at ease yet in no way becoming disorderly—these five patterns of conduct are sufficient to rectify the individual and to make the country tranquil" (translation of 20.5, Knoblock 1994: 86; see also Hutton 2014: 223). This particular passage suggests that both restraint and giving expression to natural feeling can be combined in ritual. The structure (the order of drinking) teaches and reaffirms the value of restraint for the younger but also affirms inclusiveness that answers to a love of one's kind.

The way in which ritual can arouse emotion and afford meditation on its moral meaning brings Xunzi a lot closer to Mengzi and what he was trying to do with King Xuan's memory of sparing the ox. It is significant that Xunzi focuses so much more on the role of ritual in moral cultivation, however. One of the reasons for this has to do with Xunzi's view of the strength of the recalcitrant self-regarding desires and emotions, as shall be discussed later. However, it is relevant here to point out a feature of ritual that enables it to make a special kind of contribution to cultivation. It is the fact that ritual action is typically a patterned form of physical activity in which physical gestures and coordination with others bear a moral meaning. As noted earlier, it was a common belief of Mengzi's and Xunzi's time that movements of the body's vital energies can influence as well as be influenced by the mind. In ritual, one
p. 131 performs the actions of respectful ↳ greeting, deference, of loss and grieving, and such bodily motions can activate the corresponding emotions and aims of the heart-mind. Acting respectfully, for example, by deeply bowing can activate the feeling of respect.

Xunzi is especially appreciative of the power of music, performed for its own sake, as part of dance, or as part of a ritual ceremony, to influence emotion and shape character. At the beginning of his chapter on music, he suggests one explanation for this power: the tendency to feel pleasure, contentment, and joy. The character Xunzi uses for the states of happiness is "樂," which can be either *yao* —pleasure, or *le*—contentment and joy. As in the "Record of Music" *Yueji* 樂記 (within the "Record of Rites" or *Liji* 禮記),[7] he plays on the fact that the character for music is also "樂," so that he can say, "Music is joy" (also found in *Xunzi* 20.1; Hutton 2014: 221). This suggests powerful affinity between the human tendency to feel joy and the human love of music. Music is harmony and coordination, and the suggestion is that human nature is powerfully attracted to these things in music and in human relationships and community. As in the case of love of one's kind, Xunzi must balance the picture of human nature as bad with the acknowledgment of powerful and natural impulses that are congenial to morality.

In fact, we have reason to take Xunzi's view here seriously. The universal human attraction to music is a bit of a puzzle. One long-standing speculation is that collective forms of music, dance, and ritual are biocultural adaptations that help sustain cooperation (Cross 1999; Freeman 2000; Hauser and McDermott 2003). One study attempts to test the effects of "synchrony" (e.g., having people coordinate their movements in response to a rhythmic beat) and "shared intentionality" (e.g., having them intend to work with each other to move in time with a rhythmic beat). The tested effects were on cooperativeness, as measured by self-reports of the participants and by the way they played a "public goods" game (immediately after their participation in synchrony and shared intentionality) in which they could increase the amount of money that they were given at the outset by contributing none, some, or

all of the money to a group investment. It was found that synchrony and shared intentionality, each on its own, were correlated with increased cooperativeness and that, when combined, were correlated with the largest increase (Reddish, Fischer, and Bulbulia 2013).

We have already identified love of one's kind as one of the most important features of the material that the moral craftsmen must work with. But how must the craftsman deal with the potentially troublesome features, the desires for gain and sensual satisfaction? Xunzi acknowledges that the craftsman mind cannot merely strive to eliminate or repress such desires. In seeking to remove the causes of conflict between people, one must assure some measure of satisfaction of these desires. Human beings are born with desires, he says, which if not satisfied cannot but lead them to seek to satisfy them (translation of 19.1a–b, Knoblock 1994: 55; Hutton 2014: 201). To avert the conflict that would ensue, ritual and moral principles are established to supply the goods for satisfying desires and at the same time assure that these goods would not be exhausted. The meaning of ritual, concludes Xunzi, is to nurture. In fact, it is significant that when Xunzi writes of satisfying desire, the word he uses is *yang* 養, a word that has connotation
p. 132 of supporting, rearing, and nurturing. The mind's relation to desires is not a simple ↳ one in which it judges what amount of goods is sufficient to satisfy desires and then exercises discipline in not seeking further goods. Xunzi's position is much more insightful than that. For him, there is no absolute amount that constitutes sufficient material gain and sensual satisfaction. The intensity of a desire interacts with other desires within a person's psychic economy. The *Xunzi* says that a serene and happy mind will be satisfied with colors less than ordinary, with sounds less than average, and a diet of vegetables and a broth of greens that nurture the mouth (translation of 22.6e, Knoblock 1994: 13; Hutton 2014: 246). On the other hand, if that security and peace are missing, no amount of material goods will be experienced as enough (translation of 22.6d, Knoblock 1994: 137–38; Hutton 2014: 246).

In what is that serenity and happiness based, and how is such contentment compatible with the self-discipline morality requires? I suggest that it is based in natural emotions and desires that could be deeply satisfying and sustaining of social cooperation when channeled in the right directions. When love of one's own kind and gratitude to them for one's nurturance are fostered and strengthened through ritual activity, they provide a context within which self-restraint eventually is no longer felt as a burden but rather as enabling of a greater contentment than could ever have been possible otherwise. Recall that I said one must be willing to forego advantage for oneself to be a trustworthy partner in cooperation. What Xunzi's story of cultivation reveals is that one learns the advantage that one must be willing to forego is a small thing compared with social goods that one has cultivated oneself to experience and appreciate. Happiness achieved through the cultivation of love and gratitude by the right forms of ritual places the satisfaction of troublesome motivations in a new psychic context, where they become much less urgent and less demanding of our attention and personal resources. And going in the other direction, we can see how moderating the desires for material gain and sensual gratification might make it possible for us to dedicate more of our attention and personal resources to the cultivation of love and gratitude. Restraint of the troublesome motivations is not sufficient by itself, but it can provide some psychic space within which we can begin to experience some of deep satisfactions of relationships. And such experience can help motivate further restraint, which in turn can make possible taking deeper satisfaction in relationships. Nurturing the desires involves finding out what one most desires as a person practices rituals that help to reveal what truly yields the most satisfaction.

The picture assembled of how Xunzi has addressed the problem of fostering cooperation in the face of troubling self-regarding motives is not far from identifying the solution to "the problem of emotional commitment," as characterized by the economist Robert Frank (1998). Frank has noted that forms of mutually beneficial cooperation are hindered or made impossible by an inability to trust one's potential partners. One needs assurance that others will not take advantage of one's cooperation and "bail out" of the agreement when it comes time for them to do their part. Frank proposes that evolution's answer to this fundamental problem for human cooperation is the capacity to make verifiable emotional commitments to others even if those commitments foreclose ways of
p. 133 acting that are beneficial for the self. He thinks that an emotion of sympathy with others ↳ makes one more trustworthy to others because it provides them with a degree of assurance that one will live up to one's agreements even if one can gain an advantage by breaking them. Frank proposes that there are mechanisms of natural selection that put in place the capacity for such adaptive emotions.

In Xunzi's picture, the love of one's kind plays a similar role in his story of how human beings can overcome the problem of becoming trustworthy partners in social cooperation. However, in his story, the emotions that go into trustworthiness need to be strengthened in relation to the desires for gain and profit and related emotions such as envy. Having the right kind of emotional stuff that can be turned into trustworthiness does not automatically make for trustworthiness. In this respect, Xunzi's understanding of how the emotional commitment problem is to be solved is *superior* to Frank's. The latter sometimes writes as if the biologically

given capacities are all that are needed, revealing a tendency toward excessive confidence that biological evolution provides all of the solution. What Xunzi understood is that however these emotional capacities got there, they need to be cultivated and refined through culture to do the sort of job that both he and Frank think they do. At the end of the *xìng e* chapter, Xunzi says, "If you do not know your son, look at his friends; if you do not know your lord look to his attendants. It is the environment that is critical! It is the environment that is critical!" (translation of 23.8, Knoblock 1994: 162; see also Hutton 2014: 257). This remark affirms what was noted earlier: that Xunzi, as well as Mengzi, employs a relational and holistic approach to understanding the course of moral development.

Thus, what might have appeared to be a stark difference between Mengzi and Xunzi on the motivational content of human nature turns out to be more shaded. Both must acknowledge in the end a diverse range of inborn human motivations; some are congenial to and underpinning morality, and others, if given undue attention, will lead away from morality. The inborn motivations congenial to morality include forms of other concern that form a basis for moral development. Both point toward forms of reflection and focusing of attention that play crucial roles in the shaping and strengthening these forms of other concern so that they may assume a more prominent place in the human psychic economy. Growing and crafting metaphors have important elements in common. They are activities that involve working with and fostering the psychological material one begins with. This working with is enabled by the pleasure and happiness taken in acting on the psychological motivations that are congenial to morality.

But there are important differences between Mengzi and Xunzi. Mengzi's sprout metaphor emphasizes the idea of how the accomplishment at the end is continuous with the material with which one begins, though it must also acknowledge the necessity for controlling and moderating the inborn sensual dispositions ("weeding"). The crafting metaphor emphasizes the discontinuities of moral development, what must be overcome and moderated, though it must also acknowledge the necessity for encouraging and fostering the motivations congenial to morality. This difference in emphasis corresponds to a difference in the view of the strength of the motivations congenial to morality and the range of conditions under which moral development can take place.

The difference between Mengzi and Xunzi over the strength of the various motivations corresponds to a difference in the moral values that are most prominently mentioned by the two thinkers. Mengzi mentions most frequently *ren*, human-heartedness, by far, and when he mentions more than one virtue, the most frequent combination is that of *ren* and *yi*, human-heartedness and rightness (see, for example, 1A1, 1B8, 2B2, 3B3, 3B9, 4A10, 4A27, 4B19, 6A1, 6A4, 6A8, 6A11, 6A17, 6B4, 7A33). This suggests the secondary place given to *li* or observing ritual propriety in Mengzi's thought, a place that is explicitly affirmed in 4A27, where he says most authentic expression of ritual propriety is regulating and adorning the most authentic expressions of human-heartedness and rightness. By contrast, the values that Xunzi most frequently mentions as saving human beings from themselves are ritual propriety and rightness.

This difference in moral values most emphasized reflects Mengzi's perception of the strength of inborn compassion and Xunzi's perception of the strength of the self-regarding desires and emotions. Xunzi is confident that the self-regarding motivations can be brought under control only under conditions of social order and hierarchy. Mengzi seems much more confident in the effect of reflecting on one's compassionate impulses, at least under conditions of secure livelihood and ethical education. Consider that the most prominent example of fostering moral growth in Mengzi is his attempt to prompt in King Xuan reflection on his own compassion, while the most prominent method of self-cultivation in Xunzi is that of submitting oneself to ritual. The fact that ritual embodies and reinforces order and social distinction corresponds to Xunzi's overriding belief in these things as the prerequisites for helping individuals to control and moderate the self-regarding motivations. Ritual structures daily life and marks the singular and dramatic events that constitute life passages, which may have also appealed to Xunzi. To bring the self-regarding impulses under control, one must subject them to *repeated correction* and place them in a psychological context where happiness is found in relationship with others. Ritual both corrects and affirms, repeatedly. Understanding Xunzi's disagreement with Mengzi in this way makes it possible to affirm the important views they held in common while explaining why Xunzi might have regarded Mengzi as naive and dangerously optimistic.

Moreover, it is not just the self-regarding impulses that need guidance. Though Xunzi admits there are natural other-regarding desires and emotions, they too need guidance from ritual propriety and righteousness. In Chapter 27, Xunzi says that "To extend kindness without good order does not constitute *ren*" (translation from Hutton 2014: 293). Also in Chapter 27, Xunzi says, "The gentleman dwells in *ren* by means of *yi*, and only then is it *ren*. He carries out *yi* by means of ritual, and only then is it *yi.* In

implementing ritual, he returns to the roots and completes the branches, and only then is it ritual. When all three are thoroughly mastered, only then is it the Way" (Hutton 2014: 293).[8]

Another of the crucial differences between Mengzi and Xunzi may be a particularly sophisticated version of a difference in the view of human beings that resonates over many traditions of moral and political thought. Jonathan Haidt's recent characterization (2013) of the differences between liberals and conservatives roughly corresponds to Mengzi and Xunzi. Liberals are more focused on the
p. 135 values of fairness and not ↳ harming; and while conservatives recognize these values, they are much more focused than liberals are on the values of social order and loyalty. Avi Tuschman traces across a number of traditions of thought the divide between those who think of human beings as fundamentally cooperative by nature (including Mengzi, according to Tuschman 2013) and those who think of human beings as fundamentally competitive by nature (including Xunzi). The value of examining Mengzi's and Xunzi's views in detail, however, is that a more complex set of similarities and differences between their views emerges, and we gain greater opportunity to frame more clearly the more specific issues that divide us.

There is one more kind of major disagreement between Mengzi and Xunzi to identify. Mengzi holds that there is inborn moral knowledge, including knowledge of the normative priority of morality over other things. In 6A10, he says,

> I desire fish, and I also desire bear's paws. If I cannot have both of them, I will give up fish and take bear's paws. I desire life, and I also desire rightness. If I cannot have both of them, I will give up life and take rightness…. "Thus there are things that we desire more than life and things that we detest more than death. It is not exemplary persons alone who have this mind; all human beings have it. (Bloom 2009: 127–28).

By contrast, consider Xunzi's view that it was the sages who generated or produced all rituals and standards of righteousness (translation of 23.1c, Knoblock 1994: 152). This seems to be a disagreement over the source of moral knowledge in human beings. For Mengzi, it is directly implanted in human nature. For Xunzi, our nature gives us the means to generate it. Let consider this disagreement more closely.

VIII. The Source of Moral Knowledge in Mengzi and Xunzi

For Mengzi, moral knowledge ultimately comes from *Tiān* 天, which is usually translated as "Heaven," at least in the *Mengzi*. *Tian* is the source of the mind (6A15) and the moral beginnings in human nature (3A5). In 7A1, Mengzi says, "By fully developing one's mind, one knows one's nature. Knowing one's nature, one knows Heaven. It is through preserving one's mind and nourishing one's nature that one may serve Heaven" (trans. Bloom 2009: 144). What is said about *Tian* in the *Mengzi* does not support a characterization of it as a transcendent personal deity (nor is there any explicit denial that it is such a deity), but it is clear that *Tian* has a moral dimension. In 6A16, for example, Mengzi says,

> There is the nobility of Heaven and the nobility of man. Humaneness, rightness, loyalty, and truthfulness—and taking pleasure in doing good, without ever wearying of it—this is the nobility of Heaven. The ranks of duke, minister, or high
p. 136 official—this is the nobility of man. Men of antiquity cultivated the nobility of Heaven and the ↳ nobility of man followed after it. Men of the present day cultivate Heavenly nobility out of a desire for the nobility of man, and, once having obtained the nobility of man, they cast away the nobility of Heaven. Their delusion is extreme, and, in the end, they must lose everything." (Bloom 2009: 130; see also 5A5).

6B15 even expresses a kind of theodicy, an explanation of the suffering it visits upon certain people:

> When Heaven intends to confer a great responsibility upon a person, it first visits his mind and will with suffering, toils his sinews and bones, subjects his body to hunger, exposes him to poverty, and confounds his projects. Through this, his mind is stimulated, his nature strengthened, and his inadequacies repaired. People commonly err, but later they are able to reform; their minds are troubled and their thoughts perplexed, but then they prove capable of acting. This becomes evident in their expressions, emerges in their voices, and, finally, they understand. (Bloom 2009: 143).

Xunzi tells a different story about the origin of moral knowledge, although the precise implications of his story for important metaethical questions remain controversial (see Wong 2016). Just as the vessel made by a potter is generated from their deliberate effort and not their original nature, so the sages accumulated their thoughts and ideas and made a practice of deliberate effort and precedents, thereby generating rituals and righteousness. Knoblock translates *sheng* using the word "create" (Knoblock 1994: 152). This suggests that for Xunzi morality is invented by human beings—that were it not for human beings having conceptualized ritual propriety and righteousness, these things would not exist. Michael Puett argues that Xunzi did not have in mind the *creation* of rituals and righteousness by the sages but, rather, their "generation" through the correct use of faculties given to them by *Tian* (Puett 2001: 64–73). This claim, however, seems consistent with holding that for Xunzi the sages invented rituals and righteousness. If the sages correctly used their *Tian*-given faculties to "generate" rituals and righteousness, they could still be responsible for the existence of morality. This could be so if the sages exercised their *Tian*-given reflective abilities, creativity, and imagination to design a set of rituals and standards that were conducive to transforming natural desires and feelings in such a way as to support a stable and productive social order. They could fairly be said to have invented these practices and rituals in response to a design problem. Puett is correct to point out that on Xunzi's view morality could not have been an *arbitrary* creation of the sages.

Further material for discussion and comparison with Mengzi comes with Xunzi's characterizations of *Tian*. The two most common translations of *Tian* 天 as it occurs in the *Xunzi*—"Nature" and "Heaven"—correspond to crucial ambiguities in the way it is used. "Nature," which is the translation Knoblock gives, captures those aspects of the word's use suggesting that *Tian* is an impersonal,
 nonpurposive force that brought about the world but does not intervene or change the regularities and patterns it has set ↳ in place. In Chapter 11 ("Discourse on Heaven [or Nature]"), *Tian*, it is said, does not suspend winter because people dislike cold. Earth does not reduce its broad expanse because people dislike long distances (translation of 17.5, Knoblock 1994: 17). *Tian* does not respond to entreaties and sacrifices by human beings (translation of 17.8, Knoblock 1994: 19). A conception of *Tian* as impersonal and noninterventionist Nature would seem to weigh in favor of the interpretation that *Tian* provides no normative order and so none for the sages to discover.

On the other hand, the passages cited are consistent with holding that *Tian* has some purposes but not any that require it to be responsive to human supplication. Such a *Tian* might even impart a normative order for human beings to discover.

A passage from Chapter 11 might be read as supporting such an interpretation. As translated by Knoblock, the passage reads,

> When the work of Nature has been established and its achievements perfected, the physical form becomes whole and the spirit is born. Love and hate, delight and anger, sorrow and joy, are stored with—these are described as "the emotions given us by nature." The eye, ear, nose, mouth, and body each have the capacity to provide sense contact, but their capacities are not interchangeable—these are termed "the faculties given us by nature." The heart/mind that dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five faculties—it is called "the lord provided by nature." The mind takes advantage of things not belonging to the human species and uses them for the nourishment of humans—these are termed "the nourishment provided by nature." The mind calls what conforms to the properties of its category "fortunate" and what rebels against the properties of its category "cursed"—this is called the "rule of order in nature."
>
> To darken one's natural lord, bring confusion to the natural faculties, reject one's natural nourishment, rebel against the natural rule of order, turn one's back on the natural emotions, and thereby destroy the achievement of nature—this is called the "Great Calamity." The sage purifies his natural lord, rectifies his natural faculties, completes his natural nourishment, is obedient to the natural rule of order, and nourishes his natural emotions and thereby completes nature's achievement. If this situation obtains, then he knows what is his to do and what is not his to do. Then Heaven and Earth perform the work of officers, and the myriad things serve him as foot soldiers. When his conduct is minutely controlled, his nourishment minutely moderated, and his life suffers no injury—this indeed is called "understanding nature." (translation of 17.3a, Knoblock 1994: 16; cf. Hutton 2014: 177).

Those inclined to translate "*Tiān*" as "Heaven" render crucial phrases involving the word as "Heavenly lord," "Heavenly faculties," and "Heavenly nourishment," whereas Knoblock gives us "natural lord," "natural faculties," and "natural nourishment." As Machle observes in his careful study and translation of Chapter 11, the text simply says, "*Tian* lord," "*Tian* faculties," and so on, "and the translator must divine the connections" (Machle 1993: 98). One could interpret such phrases neutrally as indicating what human

p. 138 beings have in their pristine state, or they could be taken as suggesting additionally that ↳ *Tian* has given them these things, particularly the mind, *for a purpose*. That is, *Tian* might be construed here as imparting a normative order to the world in which each species of thing has an end toward which it "ought" in some sense to evolve. The human species is given the mind with which to discover this order and cultivate itself in accordance with it. The species end for human beings is constituted by its good, the end result of its nourishment or nurturance. On the other hand, it is possible to read the passage as pointing to a structure in human beings consisting of natural desires and emotions, sensory faculties, and the mind that is the "lord" of these other parts simply in the sense that it does have the power to direct the employment of the sensory faculties, and that can not only regulate action that satisfies the natural desires and emotions but also direct which desires and emotions are satisfied and direct their shaping and channeling. In this interpretation, there need be no preexisting good of the human species that is purposed or imparted by *Tian*, but there is in fact a way to obtain much greater satisfaction for the human psychic economy through its regulation and restructuring as directed by the mind through rituals and standards of righteousness. The "completion" of *Tian*'s achievement is not demanded or defined by a preexisting normative order but is in some way a creation of the human mind and in particular that of the sages.

The textual passage displays just enough ambiguity to be consistent with this wide range of interpretations. Robert Eno has suggested that there are in fact conflicting conceptions of *Tian* in the *Xunzi*: one conception of an impersonal and nonpurposive *Tian* that provides no normative order for human beings, another conception that does have *Tian* providing a normative order for human beings, and a third conception that has *Tian* as a sort of deity that creates the myriad things (Eno 1990: 157–65). However, it is not clear that the textual evidence clearly suggests one of these conceptions *to the exclusion* of the others. To require that Xunzi express a conception of *Tian* that falls clearly into one of our mutually exclusive metaphysical/normative categories may be putting too much pressure on the text or even distorting it.

It is perhaps the greater ambiguity and mystery that hovers around Xunzi's conception of *Tian* that makes his conception different from Mengzi's. At the end of it, I suspect, the interpretive issues concerning the origin and character of moral knowledge is not settled by the text. What remains significant for the comparison to Mengzi is that Xunzi's *Tian* does not directly implant intuitive moral knowledge in human nature, regardless of whether in human beings the normative order is discovered or invented.

IX. What We Can Learn from Mengzi and Xunzi

Let us return to the metaphors that Mengzi and Xunzi use to convey their views. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have argued,
p. 139 metaphors not only express our views but also guide our thinking. We seek to understand the unfamiliar by linking it to the familiar. ↳ Mengzi and Xunzi have provided us with superior metaphors for framing our inquiry into how human nature serves as a basis for moral development. The water and sprout metaphors in Mengzi draw attention to the possibility that moral development unfolds from inborn dispositions that are congenial to morality. The tension between the water and sprout metaphors helps us to confront important issues as to what it *means* for development to unfold from the dispositions and to ask what the range and nature are of the circumstances that are favorable to or impede development. The craft metaphor in Xunzi draws attention to the need to control and moderate some powerful inborn motivations that are not so congenial to morality. It may well be that given the diversity of inborn human motivation, we need to both grow and craft ourselves in moral development.

The ultimate disagreements between Mengzi and Xunzi pose important issues about the relative strength of the diverse motivations relevant to moral development, and the conditions under which some of them can be strengthened and others of them controlled. To bring out the usefulness of the Mengzi and Xunzi metaphors, consider others that have been offered. Jonathan Haidt (2013) has proposed that we conceive of the beginnings of morality in human nature as "foundations" upon which culture and learning build, or as "first drafts" that can be revised through culture and learning. Insofar as metaphors are helpful by suggesting fruitful ways of thinking of the subject, Haidt's metaphors are less helpful. Consider that "foundations" and "first drafts" are rather inert and passive items. The foundations metaphor invites the thought that the moral beginnings cannot be modified through interaction with culture and learning, but this is just the sort of thought that Mengzi's sprout and Xunzi's craft metaphors invite. The first-draft metaphor implies modifiability of the beginnings but says nothing about what can't be modified or whether they constrain the way one must work with them in moral development. Exploration through the sprout or craft metaphor invites thoughts of this kind. Or consider Chomsky's theory that there is an innate, universal linguistic grammar that underpins all the natural human languages. Marc Hauser

and John Mikhail (2011) have applied the idea of universal grammar to morality. Here again, we are invited to think of what is inborn and that pertains to morality as something fixed and that is added to by culture and learning.[9]

Mengzi and Xunzi both focus on the relational nature of moral development: how culture and learning interact with what is inborn. The more holistic perspective on how moral development unfolds corrects a Western bias toward looking inside the individual to explain how that individual develops and changes. It helps to correct a related bias to rely on the biological and the genetic for explanations, and not to the way that biology and genetics must always be understood within an ecological perspective. The Confucian conception of moral development as a lifelong process also challenges unreflective assumptions that restrict consideration of development to the earlier stages of life. The ways in which Mengzi and Xunzi describe the interaction of reasoning and reflection with feeling and desire give us alternatives to pure practical reason or reason as slave to the passions. They provide an alternative to
p. 140 dominant tendencies in Western psychology and philosophy to dichotomize reason and feeling. In the earlier phases ↳ there was almost an exclusive emphasis on cognition and reasoning to the neglect of feeling. In the later more recent phase, unconscious, automatic, intuitive, and emotional processes are granted primacy over cognitive and reflective processes, as is well illustrated by Jonathan Haidt's (2001) image of the emotional dog that wags its rational tail. They have neglected the processes to which Mengzi and Xunzi point, processes by which reflection penetrates and partly constitutes feeling and in which reflection must work with feeling as a craftsman works with his material for the better. Confucianism is a philosophy that more than most is driven by practical aims, and among those aims is to provide specific means by which people who wish to become better can try to do so. Perhaps this practical focus helped both Mengzi and Xunzi to point to possibilities for changing oneself that are finding some intriguing confirmation in contemporary science.

Notes

1. Many thanks to Justin Tiwald and to his research assistant Sihao CHEW for comments on previous versions.

2. *Xin* is literally the word for heart, but because the heart was thought to be the seat of thinking and feeling, the word came to be used to refer to the mind.

3. In first writing about this issue (Wong 1991a, 1991b) I held that unlearned compassion had a cognitive component that was something like a judgment: that one has a reason to help someone who is suffering or to spare someone suffering. Craig Ihara (1991) responded quite justifiably that a person can feel compassion and yet make no judgments about reasons. My initial response to this criticism was to suggest that our concept of compassion is a prototype concept, the application of which is governed by a paradigm or prototype. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions for an emotion's being compassion but, rather, a set of features embodying the average or most typical instances of compassion. An emotion is a candidate for falling under the concept of compassion and is more likely to qualify the more it resembles typical instances, but there is more than one way of coming close enough to the typical. I still think this response is in principle true, but as a response to Ihara it is inadequate. It now strikes me that unlearned compassion need not have the cognitive component of recognizing a reason to help in order to serve as a sprout from which the virtue of human-heartedness can grow. Indeed, it does not have to be a judgment of any kind. As indicated earlier, it does have a cognitive component, but one that is less cognitively sophisticated than a judgment, much less a judgment of recognizing that one has a reason. At some point, as the sprout is developing on the way to becoming a virtue, I do think that compassion incorporates the judgment that one has reason to help.

4. D. C. LAU (2005: 32) translates *yi* 壹 as "blocked," so as to make the relevant line in the *Mencius* read, "The will, when blocked, moves the *qi*," but a much less misleading translation would focus on the related meaning used by Zhu Xi in his commentary on this passage, i.e., that of "convergence" or "concentration" of vital energies. See Chan (2002: 47–48).

5. The brain areas showing high levels of activity in compassion for social pain were the inferior/posterior PMCs (posteromedial cortices) and the anterior middle cingulate, which are affiliated with interoceptive information; by contrast, emotions related to someone else's "physical" state, e.g., painful injury, may recruit the sector of PMC most
p. 141 connected with ↳ lateral parietal cortices, suggesting a connection to exteroception and musculoskeletal information.

6. Thanks to Cheryl Cottine for pointing out this study to me.

7. See Sturgeon (2011, https://ctext.org/liji/yue-ji [#32]).

8. Thanks to Justin Tiwald for pointing out these passages to me.

9. As Justin Tiwald points out to me, this is a way of spelling out the difference between Mengzi and Xunzi in Ivanhoe (2000), where he compares Xunzi's view to language empiricism and Mengzi's to language innatism.

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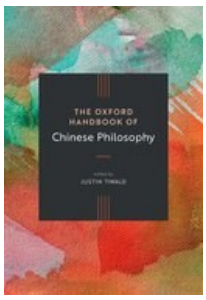

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CHAPTER

7 A Daoist Critique of Morality

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Abstract

A striking passage from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* likens devoting oneself to benevolence and righteousness and seeking to distinguish right from wrong to suffering the ancient Chinese corporal punishments of tattooing the face and amputating the nose. Common-sense morality is not merely a mistake, the passage implies. It mutilates people, leaving them blind to the features by which to navigate the Way. This astonishing rejection not just of a particular understanding of morality but of the very idea of morality as a guide to action is representative of an intriguing thread of discourse that winds through several classical Chinese philosophical anthologies. According to this discourse, benevolence and righteousness obscure the Way and impair one's ability to follow it. They are a sign of pathology: they interfere with people's spontaneous capacities, are redundant, and are an obstacle to adroit action. This chapter aims to elucidate these themes, explain their significance in the context of early Chinese ethics, and relate them to ethical discourse today. It explains how, given early Daoists' understanding of the structure of action and of the factors that guide it, their critique may be surprisingly plausible. The chapter attempts briefly to situate the Daoist critique in relation to well-known "morality critics" in the West, including contemporary writers such as Nagel, Wolf, and Williams and 19th-century figures such as Nietzsche and James. It then considers potential objections to the Daoist position and tentatively suggests how Daoists might respond.

Keywords: Daoism, Zhuangzi, ethics, morality, amoralism
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I. Introduction

What is the Way (*dào* 道) by which to guide social and personal life? In classical Chinese philosophy—the thought of the Warring States period (481–221 BC)—a prominent answer, endorsed by the Ruists ("Confucians") and Mohists, was that the Way is the path of benevolence (*rén* 仁) and righteousness (*yì* 義). Broadly, "benevolence" here refers to conduct demonstrating kindness or goodwill toward others and to the character trait of being reliably disposed to engage in such conduct. "Righteousness" refers to what is morally right or appropriate. Early Chinese texts often pair these two cardinal values as a compound, "benevolence-and-righteousness" (*rén yì*). Jointly, they overlap extensively with what we call "morality." Just as common-sense moral discourse today encourages everyone to be a good person, do the right thing, and avoid immoral conduct, for many classical Chinese audiences it would have seemed common sense that one should seek to embody benevolence and to do what is righteous.

In this context, consider the following exchange from the classical Daoist anthology *Zhuangzi* (莊子). Yi'erzi was a pupil of Yao, an ancient sage-king exalted in both the Ruist and Mohist traditions. Xu You was a Daoist worthy—Yao's teacher, according to one passage—who rejected Yao's offer to rule the empire on the grounds that the empire was in good order already and accepting merely for the title would be foolish.

> Yi'erzi said, "Yao told me, 'You must devote yourself to benevolence and righteousness while clearly stating what is right and wrong.' " Xu You said, "Why come to see me? Yao having already tattooed you with benevolence and righteousness and cut off your nose with right and wrong, how will you wander the aimless and wild, unbound and uninhibited, turning and shifting path? … The blind lack the means to ↳ appreciate the attractiveness of eyes and facial expressions, the sightless lack the means to appreciate the look of richly coloured embroidery."[1] (6/83–86)

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Xu You likens devoting oneself to benevolence and righteousness and seeking to clearly articulate right from wrong to suffering the ancient Chinese corporal punishments of tattooing the convict's face and amputating the nose. Common-sense morality is not merely a mistake, the passage implies. It mutilates us, leaving us blind to the features by which to navigate the Way. For the Way is no straight and narrow path, something we can commit to in advance and articulate as a definite scheme of distinctions. It has no fixed destination or boundaries but is instead constantly turning and shifting. It is a path we "wander" rather than march along purposefully. To wander it adeptly, we rely not on clear statements of right and wrong, but on capacities more like those by which we appreciate beauty.

This astonishing rejection not just of a particular understanding of morality but of the very idea of morality as a guide to action is representative of an intriguing thread of discourse that winds through the two major classical Daoist anthologies, the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, along with Daoist-inspired passages in the rulership manual *The Annals of Lǚ Buwei* and the Han dynasty compendium *Huainanzi*. This discourse is not associated with a particular author—its strands appear in different ancient compilations and through various strata of the *Zhuangzi* associated with distinct, anonymous authorial voices. Moreover, it includes passages presenting a range of slightly different doctrinal stances—some, but not all, for instance, make normative appeals to a conception of people's inherent "nature" or "dispositions" (*xìng* 性). Still, the various passages are tied together by a central, unifying motif: a rejection of the core moral values of benevolence and righteousness as a conception or elucidation of the Way—not just a rejection of particular substantive theories of benevolence and righteousness, but of the whole idea that the Way is justifiably interpreted in terms of such values. To the contrary, according to this discourse, benevolence and righteousness actually obscure the Way and impair our ability to follow it. To justify this stance, the texts raise several themes—some implicit in the quoted passage—that together constitute a fascinating critique of morality.

This chapter aims to elucidate key features of this critique, explain their significance in the context of early Chinese ethics, and relate them to ethical discourse today. Because the relevant texts are brief, of unknown authorship, and scattered across different bodies of writing, I will not attempt to reconstruct the position of any particular text or thinker. Instead, I will interpret selected passages and collate their shared themes into a composite stance that could have been held by a hypothetical classical Daoist thinker but may not represent the views of any actual historical figure. The resulting stance is thus not purely an interpretation of the sources but a development of them that could plausibly have been endorsed by their authors—or so I suggest. For brevity, I will not attempt an exhaustive survey of relevant passages in early Chinese texts but will attempt only to identify several recurring themes.

Before beginning, let me distinguish my subject from a related but separate line of thought in Daoist texts. Prominent parts of the
p. 147 *Zhuangzi*, such as "Discourse on Evening ↳ Things Out" (Book 2) and "Autumn Waters" (Book 17), present a sophisticated skeptical discussion of the claim that any value or guide to action could be justified universally or absolutely, rather than at most only provisionally and contextually (see Fraser 2009). This discussion can be marshaled to formulate a critique of benevolence and righteousness that complements and reinforces the discourse treated here. However, this broader critique of value falls outside the scope of this chapter. Here I will focus specifically on passages that explicitly address the paired norms of benevolence and righteousness, typically by mentioning them as a compound ("*ren yi*"). This is one reason for the indefinite article in my title. The chapter seeks to articulate just one of several potential Daoist critiques of morality.

The next section gives an overview of this Daoist critique of benevolence and righteousness by discussing two rich dialogues from the *Zhuangzi* that present several of its key themes. Section III then draws on a variety of texts to develop four of these themes, the claims that attending to benevolence and righteousness is a sign of pathology, that these values interfere with people's spontaneous capacities, that they are redundant, and that they are an obstacle to genuinely adroit action. In Section IV, I draw on these four points to construct and elucidate a composite account of the critique of benevolence and righteousness. I explain how, given early Daoists' understanding of the structure of action and of the factors that guide it, their critique may be surprisingly plausible. In Section V, I argue that the texts' criticisms of the values of benevolence and righteousness can be interpreted as criticisms of morality in general, both as a decision procedure and as a source of justification. Along the way, I attempt briefly to situate the Daoist critique in relation to well-known "morality critics" in the West, including contemporary writers such as Nagel (1979), Wolf (1982), and Williams (1985) and 19th-century figures such as Nietzsche and James. Section VI concludes the chapter by considering a series of potential objections to the Daoist position and tentatively suggesting how a Daoist proponent might respond.

II. Applying Virtuosity and Following the Way

Some of the richest expressions of the Daoist critique of benevolence and righteousness occur in a series of fictional dialogues between Kongzi (Confucius) and Lao Dan (Laozi) scattered across several books of the *Zhuangzi*. Kongzi presents and Lao Dan critiques the view that benevolence and righteousness are the Way. In one dialogue, Kongzi launches into a long-winded exposition of the classics in an attempt to win Lao Dan's assistance in placing books in the Zhou palace archive. Lao Dan interrupts and asks to hear just the gist of it.

> Kongzi said, "The gist lies in benevolence and righteousness."
>
> p. 148 Lao Dan said, "May I ask, are benevolence and righteousness people's nature (*xing*)?" ↳
>
> Kongzi said, "Yes. If the gentleman is not benevolent, he is incomplete; if not righteous, he can't flourish. Benevolence and righteousness are indeed people's nature. What else could it be?"
>
> Lao Dan said, "May I ask, what do you call benevolence and righteousness?"
>
> Kongzi said, "The heart within being kindly sympathetic while impartially practicing inclusive care—these are the characteristic features of benevolence and righteousness."
>
> Lao Dan said, "Hm, careful with that last remark. All-inclusive care—isn't that impractical? And pursuing it impartially is just itself one's own personal bias. Do you want to keep all the world from losing what guides them? Well, Heaven and Earth are indeed constant; the sun and moon indeed shine; the stars and planets indeed align; the birds and beasts indeed flock together, and the trees indeed grow upright. Just proceed by applying Virtuosity, move along by following the Way, and you've got it! Why all this hustle and bustle to promote benevolence and righteousness, as though beating a drum in search of a lost child? Hm, you're disrupting people's nature." (13/47–53)

Lao Dan presents three criticisms of benevolence and righteousness and proposes a constructive alternative. First, the ideals of benevolence and righteousness are vague and impractical and perhaps conceptually self-defeating. Caring all-inclusively about everyone is an obscure, unworkable ideal. (What exactly is it? How could we act on it in practice? What would distinguish it from,

for instance, just seeking to get along with others harmoniously?) Insofar as a commitment to impartiality reflects one's personal ethical convictions, it is itself "partial" or "biased," according to the text. Second, pursuing benevolence and righteousness is wasteful and ineffective—it results in misdirected effort and needless commotion, as if we were to march around banging a drum to attract a lost child who is in fact only playing quietly in the garden. Third, through this misguided effort, devotion to benevolence and righteousness disrupts people's inherent nature (*xing*). This is a further, practical respect in which benevolence and righteousness may be self-defeating. Presumably they are proposed to help "guide" and "nurture" (*mu* 牡) people or see to their needs. Instead, according to the text, they disorder people's nature—their inherent dispositions and patterns of activity—and thus actually impede their "guidance" or "nurture."

Lao Dan's alternative approach turns on an appeal to natural, spontaneous patterns and tendencies. In early Chinese thought, human conduct is conceptualized as a direction and manner of "proceeding" (*xing* 行, also "walking") along some "course" or "way" (*dao*). Lao Dan observes that the natural world spontaneously manifests inherent courses or ways: the days, months, and seasons follow regular cycles, the stars and constellations track repeated paths across the sky, animals flock together as typical for each species, and trees grow toward the light. The implication is that if we wish to preserve what "nurtures" us, such naturally occurring patterns present an appropriate Way for us too to follow, one requiring no superfluous "hustle and bustle." By our inherent nature or dispositions, we are able to act on patterns appropriate for us. Instead of fixing benevolence and righteousness as guidelines, we need
p. 149 only apply our inherent "Virtuosity" (*de* 德), through which we can find a spontaneously occurring Way in any ↳ situation. "Virtuosity" refers to the nature-given powers, capacities, and proficiencies by which we follow the Way. We can think of it as a distinctively Daoist conception of our capacity for agency, understood specifically as an inherent competence in navigating paths presented by our circumstances.

In another episode—perhaps a variant of the same story—Kongzi calls on Lao Dan and expounds on benevolence and righteousness. Lao Dan replies with this critique:

> When chaff from winnowing blinds the eyes, heaven and earth and the four directions are all reversed; when mosquitoes or horseflies sting the skin, the whole night you can't get to sleep. When benevolence and righteousness confusedly torment our hearts, no disorder is greater. To keep the world from losing its simplicity, just move as the wind pushes you and take your stand in the culmination of your Virtuosity. Why all this hullabaloo, like one who marches around banging a drum to search for a lost child? The snow goose stays white without a daily bath; the crow stays black without a daily inking. The simplicity of black and white isn't enough to prompt debate; the spectacle of fame and praise isn't enough to treat as an achievement. When the spring dries up, the fish live together on land, spitting moisture on each other and dampening each other with the froth. But it would be far better for them to forget each other in rivers and lakes. (14/56–60)

Again, Lao Dan presents a negative critique and a positive alternative. Benevolence and righteousness disorder the normal functioning of our heart, the organ that guides action. They disorient us, as does a blinding cloud of dust, and interfere with what normally comes spontaneously, as a painful insect bite prevents us from falling asleep. They amount to much unnecessary, ineffectual effort and fuss. Again, the constructive recommendation is that we employ our inherent Virtuosity to find paths to take in particular situations, adapting to our context much as a sailboat's path is determined by the direction of the wind. Following the Way should be simple and easy, as the goose's feathers stay white without bathing. The passage presents a pivotal cluster of metaphors for the role of benevolence and righteousness and the character of a flourishing social life—metaphors also prominent elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi* (6/22–24, 6/72–73). A community devoted to benevolence and righteousness is like a stranded school of fish struggling to survive by spewing froth on each other. By analogy, benevolence and righteousness are a desperate, futile response to pathological circumstances. Urgently tending to each other's survival might seem a fitting course of action for the grounded fish. But ideally they could find their way back to a water source—a spring that hasn't run dry—and simply swim along together spontaneously, without deliberately attending to each other.

III. Core Themes

The two selections raise many of the major themes running through Daoist writings critical of benevolence and righteousness. This section will expand on several of these themes, which are deeply intertwined with one another.

p. 150 As the metaphors of the beached fish and the mutilating punishments imply, reliance on benevolence and righteousness is typically depicted as a sign of personal and social pathology (Moeller 2009: 43; Ci 2011: 236). A concern with benevolence and righteousness signals loss of or alienation from the Way and disruption or crippling of our Virtuosity, or powers of agency. Such moral values arise only when people have failed to apply their Virtuosity to follow the Way and interact with each other adeptly. The *Daodejing*, for instance, claims that "When the great Way is discarded, there are benevolence and righteousness…. When the six relations are not harmonious, there are filial devotion and parental kindness" (Lau 1963: 22). One of the *Zhuangzi* "Primitivist" writings—so dubbed by Graham (1981) because they advocate a simple, primitive agricultural lifestyle—asks, "If the Way and Virtuosity are not discarded, why choose benevolence and righteousness?" (9/11). The *Huainanzi* states,

> Proceeding by following our nature (*xing*) is called the "Way." Fulfilling one's inborn nature is called "Virtuosity." Only when our nature is lost is benevolence valued; only when the Way is lost is righteousness valued. Thus when benevolence and righteousness are established, the Way and Virtuosity are displaced. (Cf. Major et al. 2010: 397)

Benevolence and righteousness arise through attempts to remedy deficiencies in social interaction that would not occur, or would be resolved spontaneously, were we applying our virtuosity and following the Way competently. They are not the Way but crutches or aids introduced when it is lost. Precisely because they are crutches, as long as we rely on them, we thereby prevent ourselves from following the Way adeptly (Ci 2011: 237). Interpreting the Way through these values amounts to handicapping ourselves, as if we were to require that people with healthy legs walk with a cane. The relation between these values and the Way explains apparently paradoxical passages in Daoist texts urging that other ethical ideals can be realized only by renouncing benevolence and righteousness. As the *Daodejing* says, "Cut off benevolence and cast off righteousness and the people will return to filial devotion and parental kindness" (Lau 1963: 23). A prerequisite for following the Way is that we transcend benevolence and righteousness.

A related theme is that benevolence and righteousness interfere with our inherent nature (*xing*) or our spontaneous functioning. The Yi'erzi passage implies that benevolence and righteousness damage our innate faculties. Another passage depicts Zhuangzi claiming that, in striving to exemplify benevolence and righteousness, people only suppress their inherent Virtuosity (14/12). Lao Dan states that benevolence and righteousness disorder our nature. A Primitivist essay claims that benevolence and righteousness "disrupt all the world" and those who pursue them "trade away their nature for benevolence and righteousness" (8/19). In some Primitivist writings, people's nature is associated with a specific normative conception of a simple, agricultural lifestyle (9/7), analogous to how the "genuine nature" of horses fixes a way of life for them, running about the plains and eating grass (9/1). Other passages—such as the *Huainanzi* excerpt—do not tie people's nature to a particular lifestyle but imply only that we should pursue a Way that fulfills
p. 151 our nature, presumably in the sense of nurturing our health ↳ and exercising our innate functioning. Another *Huainanzi* passage relates our nature to our Virtuosity, a link affirmed in many passages: "the Way is what guides things; Virtuosity is what maintains our nature…. When Virtuosity declines, benevolence and righteousness arise" (Major et al. 2010: 351). The implication seems to be that the healthy exercise of Virtuosity supports the flourishing of our nature. One *Zhuangzi* passage states that Virtuosity is that by which things live, while nature refers to norms associated with having a particular living body (12/38–39), suggesting a conception of "nature" as normal, healthy physiological functioning.

With the exception of some radical Primitivist passages, I suggest that these appeals to people's nature (*xing*) do not imply the implausible stance that our inborn, biological nature inherently programs us with a specific Way to follow, which benevolence and righteousness disrupt. More likely, the point is that our nature furnishes us with capacities by which certain patterns of action come to us easily and spontaneously, without intensive study or effort, and that such patterns are characteristic of good health and the flourishing use of our capacities. As examples, we might say it is people's nature to walk upright or to speak a language, or it is the nature of fish to live in water. The allegation then is that benevolence and righteousness interfere with the spontaneous, healthy functioning of our capacities.

A further, complementary theme is that the guidance available from more basic sources renders benevolence and righteousness redundant (Moeller 2009: 43–52). Such sources include our nature, Virtuosity, and the openings for action—the Way—presented by concrete contexts. Lao Dan urges that we simply rely on our inherent Virtuosity and move according to the Way. The Yi'erzi story depicts the activity of Xu You's "teacher" or "guide"—probably the Way itself—as harmonizing the myriad things "without deeming this righteousness" and benefiting a myriad generations "without deeming this benevolent" (6/88–9). An implication is that action that issues directly from Virtuosity in response to the Way fulfils the ends of benevolence and righteousness without the agent intending to do so. A passage in the *The Annals of Lü Buwei* makes this point explicit with respect to our nature: if we master the genuine features of our nature and fate, the text claims, "the art of benevolence and righteousness proceeds of itself" (Knoblock and Riegel 2000: Section 25/3.4). The *Huainanzi* explains that "benevolence and righteousness cannot be greater than the Way and Virtuosity; benevolence and righteousness lie within the embrace of the Way and Virtuosity" (Major et al. 2010: 641). Guiding action by the Way and Virtuosity is also supposedly simpler and more direct than appealing to benevolence and righteousness, requiring no hullabaloo and offering no grounds for debate. For among the problems in acting on benevolence and righteousness is that different agents and circumstances are so diverse and complex that "the bases of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are a tangled-up, confused jumble" (*Zhuangzi* 2/70)—so much so that distinguishing general or absolute values to guide action is impracticable.

A final recurring theme is that benevolence and righteousness are antithetical to "forgetting," a signal feature of adroit action in
p. 152 Zhuangist thought. In many *Zhuangzi* passages, exemplary action is characterized by the absence of deliberate, self-conscious ↳ attention that ensues when things fit well, as when we "forget" a perfectly fitting belt or shoes (see Fraser 2014). A well-known passage about personal improvement depicts "forgetting benevolence and righteousness" as the first stage in becoming a Zhuangist adept (6/90). Benevolence and righteousness force us to attend to our interactions with others, when ideally we would aim to "forget the entire world" while making "the entire world forget us" (14/10–11). The metaphor of the stranded fish implies that the finest mode of social interaction would be one in which we "forget each other," our relations with others proceeding so smoothly that both sides cease to self-reflectively attend to how they interact. The richest treatment of the metaphor presents it as a couplet: "Fish forget each other in rivers and lakes, people forget each other in arts of the Way" (6/73). The ideal is not mutual neglect but for our joint, skillful performance of the Way to fit both sides so well that we seemingly act as extensions of each other, as the well-fitting shoes become an extension of our body or a pair of figure skaters spontaneously coordinate their movements.

Suppose, for the sake of discussion, that naturally occurring patterns can indeed guide action and that we possess an inherent Virtuosity by which to navigate an adroit path through them. Why then have benevolence and righteousness become the prevailing conception of appropriate conduct? As Lao Dan explains in yet another *Zhuangzi* dialogue with Kongzi, benevolence and righteousness were never intended to be absolute or universal norms, but only temporary expedients. They were never more than makeshift "grass huts" in which one camps for a night. For "the perfected people of old," benevolence was "a makeshift way" and righteousness "a temporary lodging" from which they went on "to wander in the meandering openness," aiming at no particular destination (14/50–52). Taking benevolence and righteousness as fixed norms is a misguided extrapolation of guidance offered for particular circumstances that no longer obtain. The more fitting approach is to "connect with the Way, unite with our Virtuosity, and put aside benevolence and righteousness" (13/64). The aim is to find what fits the situation, in response to the needs of those involved, without relying on predetermined standards. As another passage puts it, what is actually *yi* ("righteous")—in this case, right or appropriate—is "set by what fits" in a particular context (18/39). The norms of benevolence and righteousness are like the Six Classics, which are merely "the worn tracks of the former kings," not the shoes that made the tracks (14/77). Neither the classics nor benevolence and righteousness offer reliable guidance, because the Way is a process of ongoing transformation—one must "conduct oneself as a person in relation to the process of transformation" (14/81).

IV. Rejecting Benevolence and Righteousness

Drawing these themes together, we can summarize the Daoist critique of benevolence and righteousness roughly as follows.
p. 153 Benevolence and righteousness are not the Way ↳ nor an adequate, practicable guide to it. Committing to them generates misplaced, fruitless effort, which directs us away from simpler, more effective paths that better suit our nature and our situation. Adopting benevolence and righteousness as guides to or norms of conduct interferes with applying our inherent capacities to find and follow the most fitting course of action. Instead, we can employ our inherent Virtuosity—our ability to respond adeptly to the shape of our circumstances—to find a Way to proceed in concrete contexts. Our circumstances as we find them—including our own abilities and dispositions—always present us with various paths of more or less adaptive, harmonious, and efficacious action.

This critical stance is rooted in and rendered plausible by a particular understanding of the structure of action and of the Way. Daoist thinkers conceive of action through the model of skills. Normatively commendable action for them is an adroit response to particular concrete circumstances akin to the competent performance of an art or a skill, such as riding a bicycle or just walking down the street. To them, it is plausible, even obvious, that competent conduct rests primarily on an implicit, uncodifiable feel for and responsiveness to one's situation. For it is a truism that skilled performances issue from such a feel and responsiveness. This view of action dovetails with the Daoists' conception of the Way. For many early Chinese thinkers, the Way can be thought of as a set of norms covering our course and manner of conduct—what we do and how we do it. Mohist and Ruist thinkers sought to identify the Way with norms that are "constant" or "regular" (*chang* 常)—that is, settled and consistent. By contrast, Daoist texts typically depict the Way as continually shifting and transforming, following no fixed or predetermined boundaries.[2] There is no "constant" Way—in particular, benevolence and righteousness do not constitute, demarcate, or guide toward such a Way. For Daoist critics, the Way simply is not the sort of thing that can be articulated through fixed norms or values such as benevolence and righteousness. The question "What is the Way?" has no determinate general answer, let alone one as specific as "The Way is what is benevolent and righteous."[3] All we can offer are vague, loose generalizations such as "proceed according to the facts of the situation" (4/43) or "rely on natural patterns, slice through the main gaps, and be guided by the major seams, responding to what's inherently so" (3/6–7).

If these Daoist thinkers' exemplars of competent action are "open" skills such as walking or bicycle riding, their view of the Way is easy to understand. Open skills contrast with "closed" skills, in which the performance of the skill is the same every time (Vigani and Heaton 2010: 8). An example of a closed skill might be drawing a circle on a fresh sheet of paper with a sharp pencil. The task and the conditions are always identical. By contrast, the Way by which we perform open skills is indeterminate and subject to constant change. When we walk or ride down the street, we must adjust to different gradients and surfaces and steer our way through traffic. Adept performance of open skills depends on a tacit feel for and ability to adjust to changing conditions. The same point holds for many of the skills explored in *Zhuangzi* passages—carving up an ox, crafting a wheel, whitewater swimming, and piloting a ferry are just a few examples.

The crux of the Daoist critique can be helpfully illuminated by applying the notion of an open skill to think through the
p. 154 characterization of benevolence and righteousness as ↳ "a makeshift way" and "a temporary lodging"—tactics employed by ancient sages in a one-off, concrete situation. Let's say I have fallen into a bad habit that impairs my performance in a skill. Suppose, for instance, that when skiing I sit back too much, making it difficult to change edges and turn smoothly (Vigani and Heaton 2010: 21–29). A ski instructor might tell me to move my hips forward over my feet, keep my hands more forward, or press down on the balls of my feet. Any of these tips could help nudge me out of my bad habit, but none of them is the Way. The Way in this case is to maintain dynamic fore–aft balance while gliding down slopes of different shapes and gradients in different snow conditions. There is no determinate or fixed technique for such balancing, and the exact movements involved change continually. Moreover, being in balance is not a specific posture. It is a relation between the parts of my body and the environment, indicated by how my body feels and what I am able to do next. Any tips that prompt me to balance better are at best only temporary aids, to be set aside once the problem is solved. Taking them as "constant" guides would indeed cripple my ability to follow the Way. After all, the point is to stay in balance, not keep my hands forward, move my hips over my feet, or maintain any other specific posture. Focusing too much on hand, hip, or foot position will not teach me proper balance and indeed might disrupt my balance in other respects.

Benevolence and righteousness, then, are analogous to the coaching tips a sports, music, or dance instructor might offer a particular pupil committing a particular fault in a particular context. In their original setting, they may have been effective hints for finding the

Way. But they must not be mistaken for the Way itself, and treating them as anything more than a provisional expedient interferes with our attaining competence in the Way.

V. Rejecting Morality

The Daoist critique is directed at benevolence and righteousness (*ren yi*), but I suggest it extrapolates to a critique of morality more generally. While the Chinese concept of *ren yi* may not be equivalent to our concept of morality, the two share enough features that we can defensibly read Daoist texts as offering a critique of morality—or at least something similar enough to be worth discussing alongside the views of Western critics of morality, such as Nietzsche. Of course, even in contemporary academic philosophy, "morality" is not a monolithic concept. A Kantian conception of morality may diverge from a consequentialist conception, for instance. Still, we can identify key features typically associated with philosophical, normative conceptions of morality. Morality supposedly applies universally: moral norms transcend those of particular cultures or communities and apply to all persons with the capacity to follow them. Morality overrides other values, norms, and practices: conduct that is morally prohibited must be avoided, even if this conduct complies with self-interest, law, or local custom. It incorporates some conception of impartiality or impartial justification. It supposedly takes up a central, fundamental place in life, partly because of how it overrides other values.

p. 155 Ruist and Mohist statements about benevolence and righteousness associate them with similar features. In the Confucian *Analects*, benevolence and righteousness are central to the life of the gentleman, the text's ethical ideal. The gentleman places righteousness above all other considerations (17:23, 7:16).[4] He "dwells" in benevolence, never violating it "even for the space of a meal" and adhering to it even in moments of urgency (4:1, 4:5). He would not relinquish it even to save his life (15:9). Benevolence and righteousness are both tied to conceptions of impartiality. The benevolent person models his treatment of others on how he prefers to be treated (6:30). The gentleman is inherently neither for nor against anything but only "sides with what he deems righteous" (4:10). The Mohists also depict righteousness as the most valuable thing in the world—more valuable even than one's person, since people will fight to the death over it (47/1–2).[5] They seem to endorse organizing one's life entirely around benevolence and righteousness (47/20). They propose their divinity, Heaven, as a model of righteousness (27/73) partly on the grounds that it is impartial to all (4/9–10). The norms of benevolence and righteousness apply to everyone, since we are all Heaven's subjects. The *Mozi* explicitly contrasts "the Way of benevolence and righteousness" with mere "practices" and "customs" and indicates that benevolence and righteousness override such parochial norms (25/74–81). Both Mohist and Ruist writings thus imply that benevolence and righteousness take priority over other values or norms, reflect some rough conception of impartiality, and play a central, fundamental role in the life of the admirable person. I suggest, then, that the classical Chinese concepts of benevolence and righteousness overlap enough with morality that we can reasonably consider the Daoist critique of benevolence and righteousness a critique of morality.

What then is the significance of the Daoist critique? Unlike some contemporary critiques of mainstream moral theories, such as Stocker (1976), it is not a criticism of any particular substantive moral theory. Its point is not that prevailing normative theories are inadequate and a more satisfactory moral theory must be sought. Nor is it the view, pioneered by James (1912), that morality can never be formulated into a final theory, since it is constantly evolving in response to new, emerging demands. Contemporary critics of prevailing moral theories, such as Nagel (1979), Williams (1985), and Larmore (1987), have argued that morality cannot be codified or is not the proper subject of a systematic theory, because value cannot be reduced to a single source, for instance, or because moral questions cannot be satisfactorily resolved through an explicit decision procedure. Critics such as Williams (1981, 1985) and Wolf (1982) have contended that morality is but one kind of value among others and does not necessarily subsume or override other values. Although Daoist thinkers might agree with some of these claims, the gist of their critique diverges from them. As Leiter notes (1997: 252), these 20th-century criticisms of morality are all directed at particular theories of morality, not at morality itself. The Daoist critique is distinct from all of them in two ways. First, it focuses not on moral theory but on morality as a practice and the associated attitude or ideology that morality is the Way. Second, it does not advocate a different understanding of, role for, or approach to morality. Rather, it advocates that morality be jettisoned entirely, on the grounds that its practice and the
p. 156 associated ideology are detrimental to the exercise of ↳ our Virtuosity and our following the Way—and thus to "nurturing life," or living as well as we can. The point is not that one or another theory of morality is problematic but that the practice of guiding and evaluating human conduct by any conception of morality is crippling. The Daoist critique thus aligns with Nietzsche in rejecting morality as a cultural practice on the grounds of its pernicious effects on human flourishing (Leiter 1997: 274). It departs from

Nietzsche in holding that morality detrimentally affects everyone, not only an exceptional handful of creative geniuses. It urges that we would all benefit, as individuals and communities, by forgetting about morality.

As their texts make clear, in rejecting morality, the Daoists are not rejecting typical practical ends of morality such as personal well-being and consideration for others. (If anything, they advocate greater responsiveness to others than most moral theories do.) They are rejecting appeals to morality as a source of action guidance—and thus as a decision procedure—and as a criterion of appropriate action—and thus as a basis for justification. In rejecting morality as a decision procedure, they advocate that we not guide action by deliberately attempting to follow moral norms. Instead, we are to seek the most responsive, fitting, effective, or harmonious way forward, given our concrete circumstances. Ideally, we need not even ask what that way is but can directly act appropriately. In more recalcitrant situations, the decision procedure envisioned seems to be simply to puzzle out the most fitting, sustainable course of action, given our values, needs, and abilities and the circumstances we face, including the demands and needs of others. We are able to work our way through such situations because of our inherent Virtuosity, which amounts to an inborn aptitude for "arts of the Way"—roughly, for responding to action-guiding structures and patterns by acquiring and extending skills. Even when we apply moral norms to guide action, it is by virtue of this underlying aptitude or Virtuosity that we are able to do so. The Daoist stance is that we can most effectively guide action directly through this aptitude, rather than through the intermediary of moral norms.

Rejecting morality as a decision procedure does not amount to rejecting morality entirely. One can consistently renounce moral values or principles as a decision procedure while nevertheless endorsing morality as a criterion by which to evaluate or justify conduct. For what is truly distinctive of morality is its claim to a special normative status grounded in universal or impartial standards. However, I suggest that Daoist critics probably also reject appeals to morality as an evaluation or a justification. When Yao urges Yi'erzi to devote himself to benevolence and righteousness and to clearly articulate right from wrong, the implication is that these are universal norms by which the sage-king governs the world—and thus, I suggest, the highest criteria by which to assess or justify conduct. When Kongzi contends that benevolence and righteousness are people's genuine nature, such that without them a gentleman cannot really live or be complete, again the implication is probably that they are a universal or fundamental standard by which to evaluate or justify conduct. In rejecting the view that benevolence and righteousness are the Way, then, the Daoists are likely also implicitly rejecting the idea that justification or evaluation by appeal to these moral values is privileged or authoritative.

p. 157 My hypothesis is that the Daoists regard such justificatory or evaluative claims as empty, redundant, or irrelevant. They see conduct as appropriate or justified insofar as it responds to features of the agent's context in a successful, competent way that allows all involved to proceed onward smoothly. There may be a plurality of ways to do this, typically none of which will be definitive. Daoist critics probably reject the idea of any stronger, more authoritative justification or evaluation beyond what tentatively seems most fitting. To them, the claim that some course of conduct is morally justified is empty: it adds nothing to the status of simply being justified, in the sense of provisionally yielding the best balance between relevant factors in some situation. Nor for them would the claim that some factor represents a moral reason give it priority in determining what that balance might be. Most likely, they would suggest there is no way to identify any feature—including the general feature of being a moral reason—that determines what considerations will take priority in every case. If we look at the examples of adroit action given in the *Zhuangzi*—expertly butchering oxen, swimming through a stretch of rapids, compromising with one's wards over food servings, nurturing a rare bird by providing a suitable diet and home—what makes such actions appropriate is that they are practically successful, according to ends set by the context. (In examples involving interpersonal relations, this success seems to be marked by both sides' accepting and flourishing under the arrangement.) To Daoist writers, it is pointless to claim any stronger justification for such courses of action beyond the fact that they work, provisionally. Moral criticism might have a point, if it calls attention to overlooked factors likely to reduce the success of some path. If we ride roughshod over others' interests, for instance, we neglect important features of our context and undertake a course likely to generate obstacles later. The Daoist proposal is simply to become as responsive to such features as we can and forgo empty, potentially self-righteous claims to authoritative justification.

VI. Critical Reflections

Much as Nietzsche's "genealogy" of morality does, the Daoist critique reminds us that evaluation and guidance of human conduct in distinctively moral terms is a cultural practice, adopted under certain circumstances for certain purposes. Like the custom of offering libations to the Olympian gods, this practice may be neither necessary nor inevitable. Hence the Daoist stance deserves careful critical evaluation. A first step toward such an evaluation is to acknowledge that a fuller account is needed of the Daoist alternative to morality than I have been able to provide in this brief chapter. In particular, Daoist thinkers owe us a more detailed explanation of the Way and of normative notions such as "good fit" (*shì* 適) or "competence" (*tōng* 通). For the purposes of this chapter, however, let me set these demands aside and consider several more immediate potential problems facing the Daoist critique.

One potential difficulty is that in their rhetoric about people's nature, spontaneously occurring natural patterns, and our inborn
p. 158 Virtuosity, Daoist critics of morality may be ↳ conflating normative with descriptive issues, in effect contending that whatever exists naturally is thereby appropriate or right. Primitivist passages that link people's nature to specific patterns of activity—typically a plain, rustic life—may indeed make this mistake. But most of the passages discussed here do not seem committed to this view. A more charitable interpretation of the appeals to people's nature and Virtuosity and to natural patterns is that our inherent dispositions and abilities are such that we always find ourselves following some Way—holding certain pro tanto defensible values and norms and employing our ability to find a course of action from them in our particular situation. Daoists need not hold that these values and norms are automatically appropriate, let alone that they are appropriate because they are natural. Indeed, the most likely Daoist stance is probably that such values and norms can be expected to require extension and revision as circumstances change. I suggest that the focus on such spontaneous features pertains less to the content of the Way and more to the process by which we find and follow it. That is, the most fitting Way is generally a simple, straightforward extension or revision of our present Way discoverable by applying our spontaneous, inherent Virtuosity.

As their texts clearly indicate, in critiquing morality the Daoists are not advocating immorality, nor "anything goes." Rather, they are urging more adept performance in applying our capacity for skilled, responsive agency to follow the Way. This constructive position suggests another critical question. Might the Daoist stance actually amount to a refined conception of morality, rather than a rejection of it? After all, they seem to advocate an unselfish, perceptive responsiveness to others, arguably a quintessentially moral attitude. Still, I suggest the Daoist approach cannot defensibly be interpreted as an alternative conception of morality, since it rejects explicit moral concepts as guides to action and makes no claim to a distinctively moral conception of justification. The values a Daoist adept acts on may sometimes overlap with values affirmed by various conceptions of morality. Some relevant texts explicitly claim as much, as we saw. But the unifying ideal is not moral; it is simply to find, for each particular situation, a fitting path by which to proceed, applying standards of good fit that may themselves change with circumstances. Any number of different paths might count as fitting in different situations, and there is no reason to expect that what fits will regularly correlate with morality.

A further potential worry for the Daoist position is whether it can support social criticism and reform. One function of morality is to provide a purportedly universal, transcultural standard by which to underwrite criticism and amelioration of repugnant practices such as slavery or foot binding. If the Daoists dispense with morality, do they retain any grounds from which to justify social reform? They themselves seem to think so, since they contend that heeding their concerns will improve social conditions. Of course, their criticisms of problematic conduct or practices will not be expressed in moral terms. But Daoist writings employ a rich vocabulary for expressing disapproval of inept or unsuitable conduct, which they denigrate as "confused," "clumsy," or "blind," for instance. Rather than improvement by moral standards, they urge greater responsiveness to our circumstances, including others' needs and preferences, and increased awareness of different, novel courses of action open to us. Indeed, by eliminating appeals to a privileged
p. 159 status of moral righteousness, the Daoist approach might present more ↳ room for improvement in our treatment of others than morality itself does. Morality can be employed as a license for cruelty, through mistreatment of those deemed unworthy or neglect of those we are not morally required to help. The Daoist approach prompts us to consider how to find a path that aligns with others' skillfully, such that both sides can sustain their course harmoniously.

Probably the most important challenge for the Daoist critical stance is to ask just what norms, values, or guidance it proposes as a replacement for morality. If morality is not the Way, then just what is? Daoist texts often present skilled performances as models for appropriate conduct. But the analogy is inexact. Skills come with built-in ends that determine what counts as appropriate

performance. The butcher's skill is measured by whether he slices cleanly through the meat, and the whitewater swimmer's by whether he survives the rapids unscathed. Conduct in general does not have such fixed ends, so perhaps the skill analogies are misleading.[6] The core question that morality purports to answer is not the first-order issue of how to perform skills well but the second-order one of what sorts of skills we are justified in performing. Becoming a highly skilled perpetrator of genocide is surely not the Way, for instance.

The Daoist view acknowledges these points, I suggest, but responds differently to the claim that conduct in general has no fixed ends. If human conduct has no built-in aim or direction, then there can be no fixed or predetermined Way, and so morality too cannot be the Way. We must relinquish the idea that any particular moral value, model, principle, formula, or justification procedure can authoritatively determine appropriate conduct. Demanding an explicit recipe for the Way is like demanding a recipe for maintaining your balance while climbing a rocky hill. The only possible "recipe" is something as blandly general—indeed nearly tautological—as "keep your center of mass over one of your feet."

So how do we find the Way? I suggest the Daoist approach is to start by provisionally accepting the values we find ourselves with and going on from there. We stand ready, in light of conditions we encounter, to modify how we apply these values, to find trade-offs between them, or to revise or replace them.[7] The skill examples provide concrete illustrations of how we might carry out this process by developing greater sensitivity to our circumstances and cultivating the psychological calm and fluidity needed to find effective courses to pursue (see Fraser 2014). Like chopping up an ox or swimming through dangerous rapids, finding and following the Way is a practical task that mixes competent performance of the familiar with puzzle solving in the face of change and novelty. The Daoist stance is that morality is but one particular approach to this task—a relatively ineffectual and frustrating one.[8]

Notes

1. **Citations to the Zhuangzi give chapter and line numbers in Zhuangzi (1956). All translations from Chinese texts are my own. English-language editions are cited for comparison only.**
2. **An exception is primitivist writings, which contend that people have a "constant nature" and without interference would spontaneously form small, simple agrarian communities.**

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3. **The Daoist critique may parallel Geuss's grounds for claiming that the question "What ought I to do?" as framed in mainstream philosophical ethics is a mistake. Once we grasp "the nature of human action and its place in the world," according to Geuss, we see that "there is no such appropriate answer that combines authority with determinateness" (2005: 59).**
4. **Citations give section numbers in Lau (1979).**
5. **Citations give chapter and line numbers in Mozi (1986).**
6. **For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Fraser (2021).**
7. **These points are explored in depth in Fraser (2022).**
8. **The author acknowledges research support through the General Research Fund scheme of the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong.**

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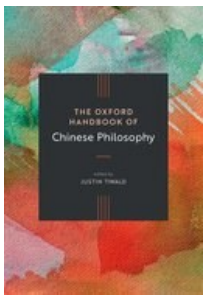

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CHAPTER

8 Harmonizing Chinese Buddhist Ethics

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Abstract

This chapter argues that at least some Chinese Buddhists advocate ethical theses that, if true, satisfy an ideal of harmony that is prominent within Confucian and Daoist traditions of Chinese philosophy. The chapter focuses on the Huáyán (華嚴) school of Chinese Buddhism, and in particular on theses from writings by Fazang and Zongmi. The thesis from Fazang is that each stage of practice on the path for enlightenment is identical to every other such stage. Thfe thesis from Zongmi is that the five central Buddhist precepts match the five cardinal Confucian virtues. The chapter argues that Fazang's thesis, if true, entails that the stages of Buddhist practice harmonize with each other as well as with being an enlightened person. It also argues that Zongmi's thesis, if true, entails that the five Buddhist precepts harmonize with each other and that obedience to these precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human.

Keywords: Confucianism, Daoism, Fazang, harmony, Huayan, path for enlightenment, precept, virtue, Zongmi

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> [T]o understand Chinese Buddhism we must understand it not just as Indian Buddhism in China but rather as a cultural amalgam, a synthesis of Indian thought and Sinic concepts and ideals. (Link 1957: 1)

I. Introductory Remarks

Harmonization (*héxié* 和諧) pervades Confucianism and Daoism. *Analects* 13.23 counsels that the *jūnzǐ* 君子 ("exemplary person" or "cultivated person") "harmonizes but does not seek sameness," while the Han-era Confucian DONG Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) claims that "the entire Dao between Heaven and Earth culminates in the beauty of harmony" (Li 2008: 426). Indeed, Confucianism tends to affirm harmony as "the highest ideal" (Li 2006: 588) and "the basic state and the underlying structure or reality" (Cheng 1977: 212). So, too, for Daoism. The second chapter of the *Daodejing* portrays being and nonbeing as mutually generating, difficult and easy as mutually completing, tone and voice as mutually harmonizing; the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, "Equalizing Assessments of Things" (*Qíwùlùn* 齊物論), counsels that the sage "brings all things together in harmony" (Höchmann and Yang 2007: 95). Indeed, Daoism tends to affirm harmony as "the basic principle of the universe" (Zhang 2002: 273).

Buddhism in China is marked by the efforts of its adherents to legitimize their foreign-born religion (see Berling 1980: 23–28; Williams 1996: 116–20). Given the importance of harmony within Confucianism and Daoism, we should expect harmony to be a
p. 163 dominant theme of Chinese Buddhist philosophizing as well (see Fung 1953: ↳ 370–75). Accordingly, this chapter investigates the role of harmony in Chinese Buddhist ethics. I aim to demonstrate that Chinese Buddhists advocate ethical theses that, if true, satisfy the Chinese ideal of harmony. However, for reasons of space, I address only ethical theses from the Huáyán (華嚴) school of Chinese Buddhism and, within this school, I address only two theses. The first, concerning ethical practice, is Fazang's 法藏 claim that each stage of practice on the path to enlightenment is identical with every other such stage. The second, concerning ethical instruction, is Zongmi's 宗密 matching of the five central Buddhist precepts with the five cardinal Confucian virtues. I argue that Fazang's thesis, if true, entails that the stages of Buddhist practice harmonize with each other as well as with being an enlightened person. I also argue that Zongmi's thesis, if true, entails that the five Buddhist precepts harmonize with each other and that obedience to these precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human.

I begin with interpretations of Fazang and Zongmi's theses. Next, I identify background metaphysical principles relevant to reasoning about these theses, situating them within the intellectual traditions available to Fazang and Zongmi. I then use these principles to establish my own claims about Huayan ethics and harmony. After situating these claims within the context of Fazang and Zognmi's projects for doctrinal classification (*pànjiào* 判教), I conclude by discussing the relevance of my claims to other traditions of Chinese Buddhism and to more contemporary analyses of Chinese Buddhist ethics.

Note: Keown divides the study of ethics into three subdisciplines: descriptive ethics, which aims to characterize the content of specific ethical theses and the way in which certain groups enact those theses; normative ethics, which aims to construct, justify, and defend specific ethical theses; and metaethics, which aims to explain the meaning of moral language and the logic of moral reasoning (2005: 21–22). The project of this chapter does not fit comfortably into any of these branches. For while it aims, in part, to describe the content of certain ethical theses endorsed by Huayan Buddhists, the project focuses on explaining relations among these theses. Keown argues that "Buddhism has a good deal to say about morality [but] little to say about ethics" (2005: 27). Since his argument turns on assigning technical meanings to "morality" (a set of standards or values) and "ethics" (a critical analysis of those standards and values), those who share Keown's terminological preferences are welcome to substitute "morality" for "ethics" throughout this chapter.

II. Interpretations

In *Treatise on the Five Doctrines of Huayan* (*Huáyán Wǔjiào Zhāng* 華嚴五教章), Fazang claims that the many stages of practice on the path to enlightenment are identical with each other. In *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (*Yuánrénlùn* 原人論), Zongmi groups the five Buddhist precepts for laypersons with the five cardinal Confucian virtues. The content of these claims is obscure. Fazang
p. 164 seems to assert an outright contradiction, identifying numerically distinct stages of Buddhist practice. Zongmi's claim, while ↳ apparently self-consistent, is unclear. If he means to affirm an identity of precepts with virtues, his claim seems to be false because the virtues are broader than the precepts. If, instead, he means to affirm an analogy, he does not specify the salient respects of similarity. Accordingly, for the sake of charity and analytic rigor, I propose to interpret Fazang as meaning, at least in part, that completing one stage of practice on the path to enlightenment is necessary and sufficient for completing every other such stage, and I propose to interpret Zongmi as meaning to assert that obedience to each lay Buddhist precept is a necessary element of possessing a corresponding cardinal Confucian virtue. I motivate these proposals in the following two subsections. Then, relying upon an informal interpretation of harmonization, I provide a preliminary analysis of the role of harmony in Chinese Buddhist ethics. This motivates the rest of the chapter.

i. Fazang on Ethical Practice

The foundational text for the Huayan Buddhist tradition is the Flower Ornament Scripture (*Avataṃsaka Sutra*). This text divides the path for gaining enlightenment into 52 distinct stages of practice: 10 stages of faith, 10 abodes, 10 practices, 10 transferences, 10 grounds (*bhumis*), and two stages of enlightenment (see Park 1983: 119–20). To complete the first 50 stages is to be a bodhisattva, to complete the 51st stage is to achieve Buddhahood with equal enlightenment, and to complete the final stage is to achieve Buddhahood with wonderful enlightenment.

In the third section of the ninth chapter of his *Treatise on the Five Doctrines*, after explaining how competing Buddhist traditions characterize the stages of practice for gaining enlightenment, Fazang discusses the "perfect doctrine" of Huayan. He explains that, according to this doctrine, "If one stage is acquired, all stages are acquired," noting that "what is meant here is the acquisition of all stages as well as the stage of Buddhahood after the part [of the path] which is superior progress, which is the perfection of faith" (Cook 1970: 273–74). According to this "perfect doctrine" of Huayan, completing even the first stage of practice on the path to enlightenment is completing the entire path. Whence "all stages and the stage of Buddhahood are identical with each other," and "[o]n each stage, one is both a Bodhisattva and a Buddha" (Cook 1970: 274).

Fazang's concept of identity is not clear. Since the 52 stages of practice are numerically distinct, his concept clearly is not numerical (*contra* Chang 1971). Beyond this, interpretive disagreement reigns. Some interpret it as a kind of symmetric relation: "identity and interdependence are simply two different ways of looking at one situation" (Cook 1977: 373); "the identity relation is … merely necessary coexistence" (Liu 2006: 259). (For similar interpretations, see Raud 2003: 140 and Jones 2009: 205–10.) Others interpret Fazang's concept of identity as a kind of asymmetric relation: M.W. LIU translates phrases of the form "x is identical to y" as "y determines x" (1979: 427n25), while J. Y. PARK understands such phrases to mean that the identity of *y* "makes possible" the
p. 165 identity of *x* (2008: 164–65). I prefer to combine elements of M. W. LIU's and J. ↳ Y. PARK's interpretations, construing Fazang to mean "the identity of y (asymmetrically) determines the identity of x" when he says "x is identical with y."

The aims of this chapter do not require settling this interpretive issue. For extant commentators tend to agree that Fazang infers claims of mutual identity from claims about mutual existential dependence. Specifically, in Chapter 10 of his *Treatise on the Five Doctrines*, Fazang provides a general argument that distinct elements are "mutually identical" (*xiāngjí* 相卽) whenever they depend upon each other for their existence (see Cook 1970: 473–74). Since Fazang nowhere directly argues that the 52 stages on the path to enlightenment are mutually identical, it is reasonable to suppose that he takes his thesis to follow from a certain specification of the general argument he provides in Chapter 10 of his *Treatise on the Five Doctrines*. Accordingly, when Fazang says that "all stages [of the path to enlightenment] and the stage of Buddhahood are identical with each other," he *presupposes* that the 52 stages existentially depend upon each other, so that each stage exists if and only if every other stage exists. Insofar as a stage of practice exists when it is perfected or completed (in the way that, say, a black belt exists when one masters the techniques associated with the appropriate

stage of karate practice), Fazang affirms that completing one stage of Buddhist practice is necessary and sufficient for completing every other (see also Park 1983: 12–14).

ii. Zongmi on Ethical Instruction

One of Zongmi's concerns in the *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* is to situate Confucianism relative to different Buddhist doctrines. He does so by positioning Confucianism as a provisional Buddhist teaching suitable for beginners who take the law of karma as the basis of their existence. After noting that, according to this law, ethical and unethical behaviors produce different kinds of existence, Zongmi claims that "the Buddha grouped [the five precepts] with the five constant virtues of the worldly teaching [Confucianism] and caused beginners to maintain the five precepts, to succeed in avoiding the three woeful destinies, and to be born into the human realm" (Gregory 1995: 116).

The precepts to which Zongmi refers are ethical guidelines for laypersons who remain householders. Four of them date to the earliest scriptures. For example, *Dīgha-nikāya* III forbids "(1) slaughter of life, (2) theft, (3) lying, (4) adultery [or sexual misconduct more broadly]" (Nakamura 1992: 304). *Sigālovāda* 13G later adds a fifth precept, to not drink liquor. Tanjing's 曇淨 apocryphal *Scripture of Trapusa and Bhallika* (*Tíwèi bōlì jīng* 提謂波利經) matches these precepts with the five cardinal Confucian virtues. According to that scripture,

> Not killing is humanity, not stealing is righteousness, not committing adultery is propriety, not lying is trustworthiness, and, by neither drinking wine nor eating meat, the spirit is purified and one increases in wisdom. (Gregory 2002: 284)

Zongmi, following Tanjing, endorses these pairings (see Gregory 2002: 282).

Zongmi does not elaborate upon the sense in which each precept matches its respective virtue, nor does he provide a justification from which one might infer his meaning. However, Zhiyi 智顗, a predecessor from the Tiantai school, advocates a similar thesis:

> Concerning the teachings, there are five precepts. Not to kill is paired with the east, the east is Wood, and Wood is based on humaneness. The meaning of humaneness is to preserve life. Not to steal is paired with the north, the north is Water, and Water is based on knowledge. The one who knows does not steal. Not to commit adultery is paired with the west, the west is Metal, and Metal is based on righteousness. The one who is righteous does not commit adultery. Not to drink intoxicating liquor is paired with the south, the south is Fire, Fire is based on propriety. Propriety means to be protected against committing faults. Not to tell lies is paired with the center, the center is Earth, Earth is based on trustworthiness. The one who tells lies is cunning, perverse, and double-headed; he is not in conformity with rectitude. The one who is upright is not biased or perverse. (Berling 1980: 23)

Zhiyi's thesis matches precepts and virtues using correspondences with the five phases (see Berling 1980: 20–22). Details of his reasoning aside, he seems to mean that obeying a precept is a consequence of possessing its matched virtue, whence he claims that those who possess humanity do not kill and those who possess knowledge do not steal. Presumably Zhiyi does not also mean that obeying a precept is sufficient for possessing its matched virtue. Preserving life, for example, requires active engagement in addition to passive abstention. Charitably interpreted, then, Zhiyi affirms that obedience to a precept is necessary for possessing its matched virtue. Insofar as Zhiyi and Zongmi's claims about precept–virtue matches descend from the same source, Tanjing's *Scripture of Trapusa and Bhallika*, Zongmi likely does too.

iii. Preliminary Results about Harmonization

Following Cheng's informal analysis of harmony in Confucianism and Daoism, say that distinct factors *harmonize* when they are mutually supportive or complementary, each depending on the others for "strength, actuality, productiveness, and value" (1977: 211). Then *yīn* 陰 and *yáng* 陽 harmonize by virtue of transforming into each other (Xunzi), while difficult and easy harmonize by completing each other (Laozi). If Fazang is correct, the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment harmonize with each other and with being an enlightened person; if Zongmi is correct, Buddhist precepts harmonize with each other, and obeying these precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human.

Fazang claims that the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment are identical with each other. In doing so, he presupposes that completing one stage of practice is necessary and sufficient for completing any other. This presupposition satisfies the Chinese ideal
p. 167 of harmony. For suppose that completing one stage of practice on the path ↳ to enlightenment is necessary and sufficient for completing every other. Then each stage of practice depends on every other stage for its actuality, because no stage is completed unless all are completed. The stages also depend on each other for their productiveness, because completing one stage entails completing all others. If Cheng's informal analysis of harmonization (or a close approximation thereto) is correct, it follows that the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment harmonize with each other. Since being an enlightened person is nothing more than completing the final stage of practice on the path to enlightenment, it also follows that the stages of practice harmonize with being an enlightened person.

Zongmi matches the five Buddhist precepts for laymen with the five cardinal Confucian virtues. He means that obeying a precept is necessary for possessing its matched virtue. If Cheng's informal analysis of harmonization (or a close approximation thereto) is correct, Zongmi's thesis does not, by itself, entail that Buddhist precepts harmonize with each other. For harmonization of precepts and virtues requires mutual dependence among precepts rather than unidirectional dependence of precepts on virtues. Nor does Zongmi's thesis, by itself, entail that obeying these precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human. However, these entailments follow from additional claims with which Zongmi is likely familiar. Or so I shall argue.

I introduce these additional claims in the next section. Some appear explicitly in available texts. Others, perhaps by virtue of being more theoretical, do not. After situating these more theoretical claims relative to the Indian Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist intellectual traditions, I argue that Fazang and Zongmi would endorse them. Then, in the following section, I return to the theme of harmony. I argue that, when conjoined with additional claims specific to Fazang's discussion of the stages of Buddhist practice, these theoretical claims entail Fazang's presupposition about the interdependence of those stages. I also argue that, when conjoined with claims specific to Zongmi's discussion of the five Buddhist precepts and the five Confucian virtues, they entail that the precepts harmonize with each other and that obeying these precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human.

III. Harmonizing Principles

When Zongmi matches the five Buddhist precepts with the five Confucian virtues, he makes two claims that are especially relevant to the theme of harmony. (The next section demonstrates this relevance.) The first is that, for each Buddhist precept, obeying that precept is necessary for possessing its matched virtue. The second, based upon the so-called law of karma, is that possessing the Confucian virtues causes birth as a human being. These claims—hereafter *Zongmi's Virtue Claims*—bear a striking resemblance to claims Fazang makes when discussing the stages of Buddhist practice. This resemblance, together with a reconstruction of Fazang's
p. 168 reasoning, reveals how Zongmi's matches ↳ satisfy the Chinese ideal of harmony. I identify the relevant claims in this section and provide reconstructions in the next.

i. Motivating a Reconstruction

Although Fazang distinguishes among 52 stages of practice on the path to enlightenment, he posits a causal sequence among these stages, so that completing one stage causes completion of the next (Cook 1970: 506–8). Fazang would find precedent for this assumption in the Abhidharma tradition, which maintains that "each stage has the power of clearing the ground and assisting the attainment of the succeeding stage" (Kalupahana 1986: 172). Moreover, Fazang endorses Vasubandhu's remark that "[t]he Bodhisattva in the stage of faith, and everything up to [sublime] enlightenment, [together] make a single dependent origination" (Cook 1970: 504). This "single dependent origination" is the path to enlightenment itself, considered as a whole composed of 52 stages. Since Buddhahood results from completing this path, and since Vasubandhu typically uses "dependent origination" to refer to a cause (see Kalupahana 1986: 59), Fazang likely endorses the claim that completing the path to enlightenment causes existence as an enlightened person. He likely also endorses the claim that completing all stages of practice on the path to enlightenment amounts to completing the path as a whole, so that for each stage of Buddhist practice, completing that stage is a necessary element of completing the path to enlightenment.

Cook (1977) appeals to these claims—hereafter *Fazang's Path Claims*—in his attempt to reconstruct Fazang's argument for why the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment are identical. The following critical assessment of Cook's effort motivates the search, undertaken in the remainder of this section, for unstated presumptions of Fazang's argument.

According to Fazang, completing one stage of practice on the path to enlightenment is completing all such stages,

> because [each stage] possesses the six characteristics, because of the infinite interrelationship or primary and secondary, because of mutual inclusion, because of mutual identity, and because of perfect interfusion. (Cook 1970: 273)

Cook offers the following reconstruction (see 1977: 113). Since the stage of faith is causal, completion of which ultimately results in Buddhahood, completing the stage of faith causes enlightenment. (This is a corollary from the first of *Fazang's Path Claims*.) Since "it is the result which makes the cause a cause," it follows that "[t]he eventual attainment of [Buddhahood] proves that the stage of faith was causal in nature." Moreover, completing the stages of faith and of sublime enlightenment are parts of the path to enlightenment. (This is a corollary from the second of *Fazang's Path Claims*.) Since "any part, according to [Huayan], is only a part
p. 169 due to the fact that the whole makes it a part," it follows that "the whole path, including Buddhahood, must be present during ↳ the first stage of development." Similar reasoning establishes that achieving enlightenment also proves that each of the 52 stages of Buddhist practice is causal and that the whole path to enlightenment, including its ultimate result, must be present at each component stage.

Cook's reconstruction is less than perspicuous, perhaps even "specious" (Cook 1977: 113). Fazang is not the first Buddhist to suppose that the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment are causal. Similar claims appear in the Abhidharma tradition and Vasubandhu's writings. Yet, from such facts about causality, these other traditions do not infer that the stages of Buddhist practice are interdependent. Nor should they. Causes typically do not depend for their existence upon the existence of their results. Causal relations among the stages of Buddhist practice establish, at best, that completing subsequent stages requires completing prior ones—for example, that one achieves Buddhahood only if one completes the stage of faith.

The mereological claims that Cook attributes to Fazang do not establish that completing prior stages of Buddhist practice requires completing subsequent ones. Grant, for the sake of argument, that each stage of Buddhist practice is part of a whole path to enlightenment. Suppose also that parts of a whole exist only if the whole exists. It follows that the existence of a stage of practice suffices for the existence of the path to enlightenment. But what does not follow is that completing, say, an early stage of practice suffices for achieving the result of the path to enlightenment. Suppose, for example, that suitable koan practice, apart from Fazang's 52 stages of Buddhist practice, also causes enlightenment (see Dumoulin 1979: 65–76). Then the stage of faith might be causal. The stage itself also might exist only if the path to enlightenment exists. But achieving enlightenment would not require completing the stage of faith.

Accordingly, even if Cook's reconstruction of Fazang's reasoning shows that completing any stage of Buddhist practice suffices for completing any subsequent stage, it does not show that completing a stage of Buddhist practice is necessary for completing any subsequent stage. Hence, Cook's reconstruction does not entail Fazang's claim that the stages of Buddhist practice are identical to

each other; nor does it entail that those stages are interdependent. This means one of three things: Cook's reconstruction is inaccurate, Fazang's justification is inadequate, or Fazang relies upon unstated assumptions. I suspect that the third of these options is correct. For Cook hews fairly tightly to the textual evidence, and considerations of charity forbid evaluating Fazang's reasoning unfavorably without first investigating whether Fazang might have been familiar with additional reasons and merely took such reasons for granted. Moreover, Fazang's reliance upon tacit assumptions would not be atypical. Lai (2009), for example, demonstrates that Fazang tacitly invokes styles of reasoning from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) when developing the concept of "Suchness *vasana*"; Kasulis (1981) maintains that Zen Buddhists frequently rely upon tacit assumptions from antecedent Madhyamakan and Daoist traditions.

I hypothesize that, when Fazang presupposes that the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment existentially depend upon each
p. 170 other, he does so because of three unstated assumptions. Early Buddhist theorizing about causation provides two of these; ↳ the third comes from Confucian and Daoist ideas about reciprocity and reversion. I present these assumptions, and their intellectual pedigrees, in sequence.

ii. Causality in Indian Buddhism

In his authoritative survey of Indian Buddhist approaches to causality, Kalupahana presents the most common and general Buddhist formula for causation:

> When this is present, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises. When this is absent, that does not come to be; on the cessation of this, that ceases. (Kalupahana 1986: 90)

This is the formula of *pratītyasamutpāda*, dependent origination. The term "this" refers to a cause; "that" refers to an effect. Kalupahana notes that, for early Indian Buddhists, the cause in a causal relation is typically a causal nexus, a collection of conditions. That is,

> early Buddhist theory [regarding causation] transcends the common-sense notion of causation. While recognizing several factors that are necessary to produce an effect, it does not select one from a set of jointly sufficient conditions and present it as *the* cause of the effect. In speaking of causation, it recognizes a system whose parts are mutually dependent. (Kalupahana 1986: 59)

Accordingly, if "this" in the formula of *pratītyasamutpāda* is a collection of conditions amounting to a single causal nexus, the formula ascribes two salient characteristics to causal relations: first, that an effect ("that") comes to exist when an appropriate causal nexus ("this") is present; second, that the effect comes to exist only when this nexus is present.

Kalupahana discusses these characteristics under the labels "invariability" and "conditionality," respectively (see Kalupahana 1986: 93–95). But these further details are irrelevant here. For the invariability and conditionality of causation jointly entail the following theoretical principle about causality:

> *Causation as Dependent Origination*: If a causal nexus C causes an effect E, then C's existing is both necessary and sufficient for E's existing.

Fazang seems to endorse both invariability and conditionality (see Cook 1970: 19–21, 506). So even though he never explicitly states *Causation as Dependent Origination*, he likely would endorse it as well.

Regarding the relation between a causal nexus and its component conditions, early Indian Buddhist theorizing seems to accept a second principle about causality:

> *Causal Aggregation*: If the elements of a causal nexus C are c_1, … , c_n, then C exists if and only if c_1 exists and … and c_n exists.

p. 171 Kalupahana notes that, for early Buddhists, a causal nexus is merely "the sum total of its various conditions" (Kalupahana 1986: 58). This indicates that early Indian Buddhists took a causal nexus to exist whenever each of its various conditions exists. Moreover, according to Buddhaghosa, "if there were a deficiency in any of the several causes that constitute a single cause, there would be no effect" (Kalupahana 1986: 56). Since, according to the formula of *pratītyasamutpāda*, absence of effect indicates absence of cause, it follows that absence of a component for a causal nexus yields absence of effect only insofar as absence of that component yields absence of the effect's cause. This indicates that early Buddhists also took a causal nexus to exist only when each of its various conditions exists. Hence, insofar as Fazang endorses *Causation as Dependent Origination* and finds this principle in prior Buddhist tradition, he likely also endorses *Causal Aggregation*.

iii. Reciprocity in Confucianism and Daosim

In his survey of Confucian and Daoist strategies to understand reality, Cheng (1977) identifies a common background metaphysics of harmonization and conflict. This

> recognize[s] the world as a harmony or harmonizing process in which all differences and conflicts among things have no ontological ultimacy but serve the purpose for completing a state of harmony of multitudinous life or for bringing forth a multitude of life in the creative momentum of the changing reality. (Cheng 1977: 218)

For example, in the Confucian tradition, the *Book of Changes* understands worldly change to follow a law of polar reversal, according to which

> [i]n all things we see the seeds of their opposites: Just as new life carries in its genetic code the signal for its own decomposition, so too in every human affair lies the seed of a subtle but exacting change. (Wing 1979: 12)

Understood in this way, differences are not ultimate: things transform into their opposites and thereby generate multiplicity, whence Xunzi 荀子, a Confucian from the Warring States period, writes that "with the great transformation of the *yin* and the *yang*, the generous supply of wind and rain, the myriad things each get harmonized so they can live, and get their nurture so they grow" (Li 2008: 426).

Daoism affirms a similar metaphysics of harmonization and conflict. For example, in the *Daodejing*,

> strength, nobility, brilliance and goodness of the *yang* are distinguished from the weak, the soft, the hidden, the negative, and the lowly of the *yin* on the one hand, and yet are conceived as having derived and being derivable from these. (Cheng 1977: 215–16)

p. 172 The notions of derivation in this passage should not be understood to connote that *yang* is primary with *yin* derivative. *Yin* and *yang*, like *wú* 無 (nonbeing) and *yǒu* 有 (being), are equal: they give rise to each other (see Zhang 2002: 252; Suh 1997: 48n58). Accordingly, Laozi 老子, like his Confucian counterparts, affirms the notion that things transform into their opposites.

Zhuangzi, another Daoist, does too. Discussing the obscurity of *dao* and speech, he writes,

> All things may be considered from two points of view—"that" and "this." If I look at a thing from the point of view of "that," I cannot see it; I can only know it from the point of view of "this." Hence it is said, "That view comes from this and this view is the consequence of that." This is the theory of things being produced by each other. (Höchmann and Yang 2007: 91)

Because "this" and "that" generate each other, the differences between them are not ultimate, and so the opposites harmonize.

Grant, then, that Confucianism and Daoism both endorse a metaphysical principle of polar reversal, according to which things generate and transform into their opposites. This principle seems to imply a kind of reciprocity among opposites, such that contraries have the same generative and transformative powers. For example, if wood (*yin*) generates fire (*yang*) and fire generates earth (*yin*),

it seems that wood, through fire, also generates earth. Likewise, if thesis ("this") generates antithesis ("that") and antithesis generates synthesis ("this"), it seems that thesis also generates synthesis.

Since the principle of polar reversal is central to Confucianism and Daoism, reciprocity among opposites should be too—if the principle of polar reversal does, in fact, entail that opposites reciprocate. Pan's investigation of a Confucian approach to harmonization confirms this expectation (2011). Consider *Analects* 15.24, which presents *shù* 恕 as Kongzi's fundamental ethical practice. Practicing *shu*, according to Pan, requires a double movement: first, attending to others in order to cultivate, within oneself, desires that sustain and nourish others, and then extending these desires toward others (2011: 236–38). This double movement ensures reciprocity among self and other, allowing the lives of others to transform one's own desires and these desires, by guiding one's conduct, to transform the lives of others. Repetition and reiteration of this double movement throughout society thereby ensure that whatever is true of one person with respect to his/her desires and aversion is also true of every other in the community. Such mutual reciprocity produces social harmony (Pan 2011: 224).

Fazang seems to affirm a similar kind of mutual reciprocity among causes and conditions. The clearest example of this occurs when he discusses a set of 10 coins (Cook 1970: 470–76). Fazang maintains that the coins are identical and presupposes that the existence of any one coin is necessary and sufficient for the existence of every other (Cook 1970: 473). Although his reasoning is obscure, this much is clear. When discussing the causal contribution each coin makes to the existence of the other coins, he performs a double
p. 173 movement (see Cook 1970: 474–75). First, he considers coin number one with ↳ respect to its causal power, treating the coin as individually sufficient for producing the entire set of 10 coins. From this perspective, coin number one has "complete power" to create the set, and the other nine coins are "totally without power." Fazang then changes perspective, considering the other coins with respect to their causal powers. From this perspective, "power is exchanged," and coin number one lacks power to create. Completing the double movement, Fazang infers "the identity of the powerlessness of power and the power of powerlessness" (Cook 1970: 475). According to this identity, each of the 10 coins has complete power to create the set of 10 coins; each suffices all by itself.

Given that Fazang affirms "the identity of the powerlessness of power and the power of powerlessness," he likely would endorse the following principle about reciprocity among causal conditions:

> *Causal Reciprocity*: If the elements of a causal nexus C are c_1, … , c_n, and C causes an effect E, then whatever is true of one c_i in C with respect to its sufficiency for E's existing is also true of every other c_j in C.

Causal Reciprocity resembles Confucian attitudes toward *shu*. For Confucianism recommends that we develop communities in which whatever is true of one person with respect to desires and aversions is true of all others in the community.

IV. Harmony within Huayan Ethics

Although *Causation as Dependent Origination*, *Causal Aggregation*, and *Causal Reciprocity* nowhere appear in Fazang's writings, there are strong precedents for each principle in the intellectual traditions with which Fazang would have been familiar. Indian Buddhists accept the first two, and the third strongly resembles similar principles from Confucianism and Daoism. Moreover, Fazang likely endorses each of these principles, and it would be reasonable for him to leave them unstated if his audiences did as well. I assume, therefore, that the principles are legitimate aids for analytic reconstruction.

I undertake three tasks in this section. First, I use the preceding principles to reconstruct Fazang's presupposition about the interdependence of the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment. This reconstruction improves upon Cook's (1977) attempt, by virtue of being a valid argument with clearly stated premises. Second, I adapt this reconstruction to Zongmi's matches between the five Buddhist precepts and the five Confucian virtues. I argue that Zongmi likely endorses the principles that I attribute to Fazang, and that his thesis therefore entails that Buddhist precepts depend upon each other and that obeying these precepts is necessary and sufficient for being a genuine human being. I conclude the section by revisiting the Chinese ideal of harmony, arguing that Zongmi's thesis about ethical instruction satisfies that ideal.

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i. Fazang on Ethically Reconstructing Fazang's Argument

When discussing the stages of practice on the path to enlightenment, Fazang makes two claims of special interest—*Fazang's Path Claims*. The first is that completing the path to enlightenment causes existence as an enlightened person. The second is that the elements of completing the path to enlightenment are completions of each stage of practice on that path. These claims are especially relevant to the theme of harmony because, when conjoined with *Causation as Dependent Origination*, *Causal Aggregation*, and *Causal Reciprocity*, they entail that the stages of Buddhist practice depend upon each other, and this interdependence entails that the stages of Buddhist practice harmonize with each other. For the sake of transparency, I reconstruct an argument for Fazang's thesis in three steps: the first two steps are lemmas, and the third derives the main result. I suppose throughout, for the sake of argument, that *Fazang's Path Claims* are true.

First lemma—*Stage Essentialism*: If *Fazang's Path Claims* are true, *Causation as Dependent Origination* entails that existence as an enlightened person occurs only if the path to enlightenment is completed. *Causal Aggregation* further entails that the path to enlightenment is completed only if each stage of practice on that path is completed. Hence, existence as an enlightened person occurs only if, for any stage of practice on the path to enlightenment, that stage is completed. Since each element of a set of necessary conditions is, itself, a necessary condition, this entails that, for any stage of practice on the path to enlightenment, existence as an enlightened person occurs only if that stage is completed.

Second lemma—*Total Power Stages*: If *Fazang's Path Claims* are true, *Causal Aggregation* entails that the path to enlightenment is completed if each stage of practice on that path is completed. This entails that there is some stage on this path such that completion of that stage suffices for completion of the path as a whole. (If no stage alone suffices for completing the path, then, for each stage, completing that stage is compatible with not completing the path. But this entails that completing all stages is compatible with not completing the path, contrary to the corollary of *Causal Aggregation*.) Since *Fazang's Path Claims* also entail, via *Causation as Dependent Origination*, that existence as an enlightened person occurs if the path to enlightenment is completed, it follows that there exists some stage of practice on the path to enlightenment such that completing that stage suffices for being an enlightened person. *Causal Reciprocity* thereby entails that, for any stage of practice on the path to enlightenment, completing that stage suffices for being an enlightened person.

Theorems: *Stage Essentialism* and *Total Power Stages*, together with *Fazang's Path Claims*, jointly entail that, for any two stages of practice on the path to enlightenment, completing one stage is necessary and sufficient for completing the other. They also entail that, for any stage of practice on the path to enlightenment, completing that stage is necessary and sufficient for being an enlightened person.

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ii. Homologies and Harmonies from Zongmi

Zongmi provides no justification for his matchings of Buddhist precepts with Confucian virtues. Nakamura notes that other Chinese Buddhists, when offering similar claims, also fail to provide justification; he attributes this to a Chinese Buddhist tendency to be satisfied with intuitive imagery and "arbitrary syncretism" (1964: 291–93). A more charitable interpretation, however, construes Zongmi's justification as teleological: his claims, if true, satisfy a widely accepted ideal of harmony. Zongmi, unfortunately, does not provide this justification. But he has the resources for doing so.

Zongmi appears to have been unfamiliar with Fazang's writings (Gregory 2002: 71). He is, however, independently familiar with Indian Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist intellectual traditions. His critique of spontaneity (*zìrán* 自然) relies upon a principle similar to *Causation as Dependent Origination*, namely, that "the causes and conditions of one thing do not also engender another thing and that the causal process does not act wantonly" (Gregory 2002: 272). His 10-stage model of conditional origination also seems to satisfy *Causal Reciprocity*. For that model presents the process of enlightenment and delusion as cyclical, with each stage deriving more or less directly from the others (see Gregory 2002: 196–205). Given these similarities and his intellectual background, Zongmi likely would endorse *Causation as Dependent Origination*, *Causal Aggregation*, and *Causal Reciprocity*. He thereby would have available to him arguments to show that the five Buddhist precepts depend upon each other and that obeying these precepts is necessary and sufficient for being a genuine human.

When matching precepts with virtues, Zongmi makes two claims relevant to such arguments—*Zongmi's Virtue Claims*. The first is that, for each of the five fundamental Buddhist precepts, obeying that precept is necessary for possessing its matched virtue. Possessing Confucian virtues, according to this claim, involves the presence of elements necessary for virtue possession. The virtues, of course, are broader than the precepts. For example, according to *Analects* 6.22, humaneness (*rén* 仁) involves initiative in self-cultivation and delayed attention to results or rewards of action; according to *Analects* 12.1, humaneness also involves restraint of self-originated desires and compliance with social customs. So humaneness, according to Confucianism, involves more than mere abstention from killing. Zongmi is likely aware of such differences. So it is reasonable to infer, on the basis of Zongmi's matching claim, that each Confucian virtue is a kind of whole, possession of which amounts to the presence of a collection of elements—with obedience to a matched precept being one such element.

The second of *Zongmi's Virtue Claims* is that possessing the Confucian virtues causes birth as a human being. Confucian teachings endorse a similar causal relation between possessing virtues and being a genuine human. For example, many passages in *Mengzi* 孟子 portray those without the sprouts of virtue as animal or otherwise inhuman. Many passages also portray those who develop the sprouts, thereby acquiring the Confucian virtues, as consummating their development as humans (see Behuniak 2009: 119–20;
p. 176 Robins 2010). Zongmi is likely familiar with such teachings. So it is reasonable to infer, ↳ on the basis of his causal claim about the virtues, that possessing the Confucian virtues causes existence as a genuine human.

When conjoined with *Causation as Dependent Origination*, *Causal Aggregation*, and *Causal Reciprocity*, these corollaries to *Zongmi's Virtue Claims*—hereafter *Zongmi's Virtue Corollaries*—entail that the five Buddhist precepts depend upon each other and that obeying these precepts is necessary and sufficient for being a genuine human. I reconstruct this argument in three steps: the first two steps are lemmas; the third completes the argument. Then I demonstrate that these entailments show Buddhist precepts to harmonize with each other and with being a genuine human. I suppose throughout, for the sake of argument, that *Zongmi's Virtue Corollaries* are true.

Lemma 1—*Precept Essentialism*: If *Zongmi's Virtue Corollaries* are true, *Causation as Dependent Origination* entails that being a genuine human suffices for possessing the Confucian virtues. *Causal Aggregation* further entails that possessing the Confucian virtues suffices for the presence of the elements of those virtues, including obedience to the five precepts. Hence, being a genuine human suffices for the presence of each element of the Confucian virtues. It follows that for any such element, being a genuine human suffices for the presence of that element.

Lemma 2—*Total Power Precepts*: If *Zongmi's Virtue Corollaries* are true, *Causal Aggregation* entails that being a genuine human is necessary for the presence of each constituent element of the Confucian virtues. This entails that there is some such element (perhaps obedience to a precept, perhaps not) such that the presence of that element suffices for being a genuine human. Since *Zongmi's Virtue Corollaries* also entail, via *Causation as Dependent Origination*, that being a genuine human is necessary for possessing the Confucian virtues, it follows that there exists some such element for which the presence of that element suffices for being a genuine human. *Causal Reciprocity* thereby entails that, for any constituent element of a Confucian virtue, the presence of that element suffices for being a genuine human.

Theorems: *Precept Essentialism* and *Total Power Precepts*, together with *Zongmi's Virtue Corollaries*, jointly entail that, for any two constituent elements of some Confucian virtue, the presence of that element is necessary and sufficient for the presence of the other. These claims also entail that for any constituent element of a Confucian virtue, the presence of that element is necessary and sufficient for being a genuine human. Insofar as the Buddhist precepts are necessary elements of the Confucian virtues, it follows that the five Buddhist precepts depend upon each other and that obeying any one of these precepts is necessary and sufficient being a genuine human.

If these interdependence claims are correct, Cheng's informal analysis of harmonization (or a close approximation thereto) entails that the five Buddhist precepts for laypersons harmonize with each other and that obedience to these precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human. For suppose that the interdependence claims are correct. Then obedience to each precept depends for its actuality upon obedience to every other, because no precept is obeyed unless all are. Obedience to each precept also depends for its productivity upon obedience of every other precept, because obeying one suffices for obeying all. Insofar as distinct elements
p. 177 harmonize whenever they depend upon ↳ each other for their actuality and productivity, it follows that the five Buddhist precepts

harmonize with each other. Similar reasoning entails that obeying the five Buddhist precepts harmonizes with being a genuine human.

V. Harmony beyond Huayan Ethics

Apart from harmonizing stages on the path to enlightenment and Buddhist precepts with each other, respectively, Fazang and Zongmi harmonize Huayan ethics with a prima facie incompatible Confucian ethics. The way in which they do so—by situating Confucian and Huayan teachings within a system of doctrinal classification (*panjiao*)—helps to explain certain peculiarities with appealing to Confucian concepts (of reciprocity and virtue) in order to establish harmony within Huayan ethics. Accordingly, in this section, I present Fazang and Zongmi's systems of doctrinal classification. This allows me to address two specific questions about the relation between Huayan and Confucian ethics, namely: Why would Fazang and Zongmi rely upon causal relations when harmonizing their ethical theses, given that Confucian notions of harmony do not mention causality? And if obeying Buddhist precepts are necessary for possessing Confucian virtue, how—if at all—does Buddhist virtue differ from Confucian virtue?

i. Aims of Doctrinal Classification

Chinese Buddhists face two problems in advocating their particular understanding of Buddhism (Gregory 2002: 108). The *Problem of Interpretation*, shared by Indian Buddhist traditions, is that the Buddha's teachings for some audiences seem to conflict with his teachings for other audiences. For instance, in the *Ananda Sutra* (and elsewhere), the Buddha seems to deny the existence of the self, claiming that "all phenomena are not-self." Yet he often uses personal pronouns, and sometimes he speaks as if there is a self that acts or experiences. (Whence, in verse 160 of Chapter 12 of the *Dhammapada*, he says, "Oneself is refuge of oneself.") Such pronouncements cannot be treated on a par, because they seem to be mutually inconsistent (see Chapter 6 in Gowans 2003). Yet to reject any of them would be to reject the Buddha's Dharma or, at least, to induce uncertainty regarding how to pursue the Buddha's way and attain enlightenment (Thurman 1978: 22–23). Chinese Buddhists traditions face a further *Problem of Integration*, namely, that Buddhism seems to be incompatible with central Chinese values, especially to many indigenous intellectuals (see Williams 1996: 116–20). For instance, in the *Gongyang Commentary* (*Gōngyángzhuàn* 公羊傳), WU Zixu declares that sons are obliged to avenge unjust harms to their fathers. Yet verse 21 of Chapter 6 of the *Brahma Net Sutra* forbids such filial vengeance. (I will discuss more details of this particular contrast.)

In order to solve the *Problems of Interpretation and Integration*, Fazang and Zongmi, like many of their contemporaries, invoke a
p. 178 two-step strategy (see Gregory 2002: 95–96 ↳ and 104–6). The first step relativizes each of the Buddha's teachings to a specific context. For instance, one might hold that the Buddha denies the existence of an enduring self when his purpose is to rid students of their attachments, while he speaks as if there is an enduring self when his purpose is merely to converse in everyday language with no pretense of revealing metaphysical truths. Portraying the Buddha as a practitioner of skillful means (*upaya*), adapting his pronouncements to conversational context, resolves apparent contradictions among teachings by treating some of those pronouncements as conversationally appropriate despite their lack of ultimate truth. Nor would this strategy be ad hoc; it has many scriptural bases, whence Chapter 7 of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* notes that "all the Buddhas in the worlds in the 10 directions know that the inclinations of sentient beings are not the same, and so they teach and train them according to their needs and capacities" (Cleary 1993: 272).

Determining which teachings are correct (as opposed to mere skillful means), however, requires a second step, namely, ranking the degree to which each teaching embodies ultimate truth. For instance, one might hold that a teaching embodies ultimate truth to the extent that it abstains from attributing intrinsic natures to objects. Or, supposing that the Buddha only gradually revealed his teachings in order to prepare others to understand their true meaning and significance, one might hold that a teaching embodies ultimate truth insofar as it occurs later in the Buddha's career. The diverse traditions of Chinese Buddhism adopt different criteria for ranking the Buddha's teachings, resulting in a range of doctrinal classification schemes (*panjiao*) (Liu 1981: 12). (Incidentally, these ranking schemes secure a limited kind of harmony among teachings so ranked, by virtue of uniting [or equalizing] apparently competing teachings within a comprehensive rubric.)

ii. The Significance of Causality

When implementing the preceding two-step solution to the *Problems of Interpretation and Integration*, the patriarchs of the Huayan School tend to adopt ranking criteria that track the role and significance various traditions assign to causality. Fazang classifies Buddhist teachings into five categories, each of which progressively decreases its distance from ultimate truth (see Gregory 1983: 32–33, 2002: 115–16):

1. Teaching of the Lesser Vehicle, exemplified by reductionist doctrines from the Abhidharma tradition.
2. Elementary Teaching of the Great Vehicle, corresponding somewhat to Madhyamaka doctrine but primarily to Xuanzang's brand of Yogacara.
3. Advanced Teaching of the Great Vehicle, exemplified by the Tathagatagarbha doctrine elaborated in the *Awakening of Faith*.
4. Sudden Teaching, associated with the *Vimalamirtinirdesa Sutra*.
5. Perfect Teaching, best elaborated in the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*.

p. 179 Apart from the Sudden Teaching, these categories differ with respect to their content. (On the Sudden Teaching's place in Fazang's scheme, see Liu 1981: 31–33; Gregory 2002: 137–44.) Specifically, Fazang's ranking order largely corresponds to perceived differences among the teachings with respect to their characteristic theories of causation—and in particular with respect to the (putative) comprehensiveness of those theories. The Teaching of the Lesser Vehicle focuses on *karma* causation, according to which causes necessitate their effects; the Elementary Teaching introduces *alayavijnana* causation, which traces causes to their source in *alayavijnana*, the storehouse consciousness; the Advanced Teaching introduces *tathagatagarbha* causation, which bases *alayavijnana* upon the more fundamental *tathata* or *tathagatagarbha*; and the Perfect Teaching introduces *dharmadhatu* causation, according to which causes and their effects are, in some sense, identical to each other (see Lai 1977: 248–52, 255–57; Liu 1981: 20–29).

Zongmi's classification scheme also contains five categories. But Zongmi's scheme includes teachings omitted by Fazang, differentially ranks the teachings that correspond to Fazang's second category, and ignores differences among Fazang's last three categories (Gregory 1983: 33; 2002: 134–35).

1. Teaching of Men and Gods.
2. Teaching of the Lesser Vehicle.
3. Teaching of the Phenomenal Appearances of the Dharmas, corresponding to Madhyamaka doctrine.
4. Teaching that Negates Phenomenal Appearance, corresponding to Xuanzang's brand of Yogacara.
5. Teaching that Reveals the Nature, exemplified by the Tathagatagarbha doctrine but also including Fazang's Sudden and Perfect Teachings.

Zongmi's scheme downplays the significance of differences among certain theories of causation (such as *tathagatagarbha* and *dharmadhatu* causation) in order to focus on soteriological differences between teachings (Gregory 2002: 116–17, 206–9). But the low status of the Teaching of Men and Gods at least mimics Fazang's penchant for ranking teachings based upon perceived differences in their theories of causation.

According to the Teaching of Men and Gods, obeying certain Buddhist precepts for laity secures rebirth as a man or a god. Zongmi likely includes (at least elements of) Confucian ethics as part of this teaching, since he matches Buddhist precepts with Confucian virtues (see Gregory 2002: 279–85). He therefore departs from Fazang, by including non-Buddhist teachings in his classification scheme. Nonetheless, the Teaching of Men and Gods does not attend to the causal factors responsible for the arising and cessation of karma. Hence, even a syncretic version of Confucianism, which mixes together Confucian teachings about virtue with Buddhist teachings about rebirth, contains a less comprehensive theory of causation than do the other teachings in Zongmi's scheme. (Fazang

concurs, holding that worldly teachings, such as Confucianism, are “based on the present and [do] not speak of causes, conditions and karmic results to come” [Kotyk 2016].)

p. 180 The centrality of causality to Fazang’s and Zongmi’s systems of doctrinal classification, together with the perception that certain teachings—such as elements of Confucian ethics—attend very little to causality, explains why Fazang and Zongmi would find it natural to appeal to causal considerations in harmonizing their ethical theses. For while indigenous intellectual traditions do not mention causality in their discussions or illustrations of harmony, Fazang and Zongmi’s classification schemes explain this omission as an artifact of incomplete teachings. Those same schemes also position their own approach to harmony—through causality—as more comprehensive than, and therefore superior to, more traditional approaches.

iii. Conceptions of Virtue

The importance Fazang and Zongmi assign to causality not only situates the general Huayan approach to harmony within a general comparative framework but also, and more specifically, helps to elucidate the relation between Buddhist and Confucian virtue. Keown maintains that Buddhist precepts and virtues are two sides of the same coin, construing the precepts as “a list of things a virtuous person would never do” (Keown 2005: 12). Suppose he is correct. Then since, according to Zongmi, obeying Buddhist precepts is necessary for possessing Confucian virtue, there should be some kind of significant relation between Confucian and Buddhist virtue.

Discerning the nature of this relationship is difficult. There is no scholarly consensus on the nature of Confucian virtue. Recent scholarship emphasizes parallels between classical Confucian ethics and Aristotelian virtue theory, so that Confucian virtue aims to cultivate a certain kind of flourishing person (see Loy 2013 for an overview). Within this research program, however, there is little agreement about details (see Lee 2013: 52–53; Slingerland 2001: 98). Moreover, there are competing interpretations. Ivanhoe (1991), for example, maintains that classical Confucian ethics are a kind of character consequentialism, so that Confucian virtue aims to cultivate certain kinship relationships (among others). Similar disagreement persists regarding the nature of Buddhist ethics, with scholars variously interpreting Buddhist virtue as consequentialist, virtue ethical, a combination thereof, or something entirely distinct (see Finnigan 2010 for an overview).

These disagreements, among scholars of both Confucian and Buddhist ethics, tend to concern the source (or reason) for virtue’s value or the nature of the goal that virtuous action facilitates. But, for present purposes, it is possible to characterize (at least partially) the relation between Confucian and Buddhist virtue without resolving these issues. The key to doing this, at least from a Huayan perspective, is to focus on the range of factors relevant to enacting virtue. For if, as both Fazang and Zongmi maintain, Buddhists attend to causal factors better than Confucians do, and if, as Buddhists of the time seem to have accepted, our causal relations with kin (and others) stretch across lifetimes, we should expect Buddhist-styled virtuous behavior to require attending to a wider range of persons than Confucian-styled virtuous behavior.

p. 181 An example illustrates and confirms this expectation. Filial piety (*xiào* 孝) is a well-known Confucian virtue. Less well-known is that Confucian-styled filial piety condones—perhaps even obliges—children avenging unjust harms to their parents. In an aforementioned passage in the *Gongyang Commentary*, for example, Wu Zixu argues that “When the father does not receive a just execution the son ought to avenge him” (quoted in Cheng 2004: 27). Similarly, the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮) teaches that the severity of filial retaliation depends upon how close in kinship the murdered relative is (Cheng 2004: 25). Buddhist-style filial piety, however, prohibits such retaliation. Discussing the issue in his *Commentary on the Brahma Net Sutra*, Fazang writes,

> these enemies [avenged by filial retaliation] might have been one’s own parents in a past life. Now if you kill them, how could you accomplish filial acts? Thus it states, “It is not in accord with the path of filial piety.” (Kotyk 2016)

Fazang’s argument appeals to the notion of rebirth: the person one harms might have been reborn from someone who once was one’s parent; hence, filial retaliation might violate the demands of filial piety. This resembles the reasoning associated with the 20th and 21st secondary precepts of the *Brahma Net Sutra* (see Kinh 2000). In particular, Fazang’s reasoning hinges upon attention to (purported) causal relations (of parenthood) across lifetimes. His argument thereby illustrates the way in which widening the range of factors considered relevant to enacting filial piety thereby alters the moral requirements of filial piety.

The contrast between Confucian-styled and Buddhist-styled filial piety illustrates the more general relation between Confucian and Buddhist virtue: the former treats a narrower range of factors as relevant to enactments of virtue, ignoring causal relations (across lifetimes) that Buddhists consider to be relevant (also see Gregory 2002: 264–65). This relationship is compatible with Zongmi's matches between Buddhist precepts and Confucian virtues, since obeying Buddhist precepts is necessary but not sufficient for enacting Buddhist virtue. More significantly, the relationship suggests that, while obedience to Buddhist precepts is a necessary step to achieving Confucian virtue (if Zongmi is correct), achieving Confucian virtue is likewise only a step toward attaining Buddhist virtue.

VI. Concluding Remarks

When Fazang identifies the 52 stages of practice on the path to enlightenment, he harmonizes Huayan religious practice. When Zongmi matches the five fundamental Buddhist precepts for laypersons with the five cardinal Confucian virtues, he harmonizes Huayan guidelines for ethical behavior. These harmonies reflect Confucian and Daoist ideals, and they position Buddhist practices as legitimate despite their Indian origins.

p. 182 The analytic reconstructions in this chapter demonstrate that Fazang's and Zongmi's ethical theses satisfy a Confucian and Daoist ideal of harmony. They provide three further benefits as well. First, they refute Nakamura's claim, regarding Chinese Buddhist tendencies to identify differences, that "[w]hat stands out … is a certain sort of utilitarianism and uneasy compromise, with cold logical consideration completely abandoned" (1964: 291). For the reconstructions show the interdependencies, by which Fazang and Zongmi achieve their harmonies, to be conclusions of logically valid arguments. Second, the reconstructions contribute to understanding Chinese Buddhism as "a cultural amalgam, a synthesis of Indian thought and Sinic concepts and ideals" (Link 1957: 1). For the arguments in the reconstructions rely upon metaphysical assumptions from Indian Buddhist and indigenous Chinese traditions, and the reconstructions themselves specify how these assumptions allow Fazang and Zongmi to achieve their harmonies. Finally, the reconstructions explain (away) the counterintuitiveness of Fazang and Zongmi's theses—Zongmi's, by identifying a motivation for his matches with respect to an ideal of harmony and providing a charitable interpretation of his matching relation, and Fazang's, by deriving presuppositions of his identity claims from less counterintuitive assumptions and motivating these assumptions with respect to intellectual traditions available to Chinese Buddhists.

Although the Huayan tradition in China does not survive the Huichang persecution of 845 CE, its harmonies do. For example, Master Qisong 契嵩 (1007–1072), part of the Chán 禪 tradition, reproduces Zongmi's matches between precepts and virtues (Shinohara 1982). Master Chewu 徹悟 (1741–1810), part of Linji's臨濟 Chan tradition, endorses a harmony similar to Fazang's, writing that "[t]he very moment of contemplating the buddha is the very moment of seeing the buddha and becoming the buddha" (Jones 2003: 12). (Indeed, Park [1983] argues that Fazang's identities support the well-known Chan doctrine of so-called sudden enlightenment over the competing doctrine of gradual enlightenment.) I conjecture, moreover, that similar attempts at harmonization pervade Chinese Buddhism. If so, the arguments in this chapter should be relevant to Chinese Buddhist ethics beyond the Huayan context.[1]

Note

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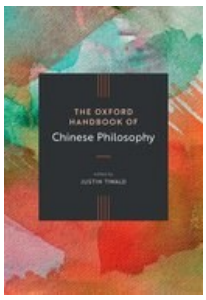

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CHAPTER

9 Moral Failure, Ethical Roles, and Metaphysics in the *Great Learning* and the *Mean*

Bryan W. Van Norden

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Abstract

This article introduces two brief but immensely influential classics of Chinese philosophy: the *Great Learning* and the *Mean.* Canonized as two of the Four Books (along with the *Analects* of Confucius and the eponymous *Mengzi*), the *Great Learning* and the *Mean* were carefully studied, and their meaning was heatedly debated among later Confucians (particularly neo-Confucians like ZHU Xi [1130–1200] and WANG Yangming [1472–1529]). The *Great Learning* became the focus of a debate over weakness of will and how to overcome it. ZHU Xi found in the *Great Learning* a view of moral cultivation that begins with learning about morality and then proceeds to making that knowledge motivationally efficacious through "reverential attention," a sort of mental focus. In contrast, WANG Yangming used models drawn from the *Great Learning* to argue that moral knowledge and moral motivation are inseparable, so weakness of the will is impossible. The *Mean* offers insights on a variety of topics (including the cardinal virtues and philosophical psychology) but is perhaps most interesting for its suggestion that the principle of reciprocity ("Do not inflict upon others what you would be unwilling to accept if it were inflicted upon yourself") must be supplemented with an understanding of the social roles that people occupy.

Keywords: Great Learning, Mean, ethics, metaphysics, neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, weakness of will, reciprocity, Golden Rule

Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy

Series: Oxford Handbooks

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> Only after meditating on this back and forth, day and night, have I come to realize that the Way of the sages and worthies is not solely of the past and inappropriate to the present, that truly it is not impractical and inapplicable to the conduct of affairs, that really it is neither eccentric nor strange … —WU Yubi (Kelleher, 2013: 81)

I. Introduction

The *Great Learning* (*Dàxué* 大學) and the *Mean* (*Zhōngyōng* 中庸) are two brief but immensely influential Confucian texts.[1] The *Great Learning* became the focus of a debate over weakness of will and how to overcome it. ZHU Xi (1130–1200) found in the *Great Learning* a view of moral cultivation that begins with learning about morality and then proceeds to making that knowledge motivationally efficacious through "reverential attention," a sort of mental focus. In contrast, WANG Yangming (1472–1529) used models drawn from the *Great Learning* to argue that moral knowledge and moral motivation are inseparable, so weakness of the will is impossible. The *Mean* offers insights on a variety of topics (including the cardinal virtues and philosophical psychology) but is perhaps most interesting for its suggestion that the principle of reciprocity ("Do not inflict upon others what you would be unwilling to accept if it were inflicted upon yourself") must be supplemented with an understanding of the social roles that we occupy.

p. 187 The *Great Learning* and the *Mean* are evocative but elusive works. Consequently, it is almost impossible to read them except through the lens of various later commentaries. Although he lived almost two millennia after the *Great Learning* and the *Mean* were composed, it was ZHU Xi who cemented the importance of these works by including them among the Four Books that he made central to Confucian education (along with the *Analects* 論語 and the *Mengzi* 孟子).[2] Moreover, ZHU Xi's interpretation of Confucianism became orthodoxy, so later interpreters either took it for granted or, like Wang, were consciously reacting against it. Consequently, it will be useful to begin with a brief overview of the theory of ethical cultivation and metaphysics that ZHU Xi uses as a framework for interpreting the *Great Learning* and the *Mean*.

ZHU Xi believes that humans are born with complete ethical knowledge. However, this knowledge is obscured by physical desires. Consequently, becoming a virtuous person is a matter of rediscovering what one already, in some sense, knows. In terms of metaphysics, ZHU Xi holds that the universe is structured by an underlying Pattern (*lǐ* 理, often translated "principle"). He sometimes describes the Pattern in terms that are superficially similar to the Platonic language of Forms. For example, the fact that a cart can only travel by land while a boat can only travel by water is due to the Pattern (Tiwald and Van Norden, 2014: 171; hereafter cited as RLCP). However, if we consider ZHU Xi's comments as a whole, it is clear that he agrees with the famous neo-Confucian slogan "Pattern is one, but its manifestations are diverse" (RLCP: 174). In other words, Pattern is one and the same in everything, but things are differentiated by having specific allotments of *qi* 氣, the spatiotemporal stuff that constitutes concrete entities.[3] In addition to having spatial dimensions, qi comes in varying degrees of "clarity" and "turbidity." The clarity or turbidity of qi determines the extent to which the Pattern manifests itself in any particular entity: "Pattern in clear *qi* is like a jewel in clear water: its brightness is fully visible. Pattern in turbid *qi* is like a jewel in turbid water: you cannot see its brightness outside" (RLCP: 174).

Let's put that in more concrete terms. Consider two French bulldogs. These animals share the same underlying structure as everything else in the universe (the Pattern). This is reflected in the similarities between their characteristics and those of other mammals and living things. For example, dogs can manifest traits that are analogous to the human virtues of loyalty and courage. However, French bulldogs are distinct from other animals because their qi is clearer than that of "lower" animals like fish, but more turbid than that of "higher animals" like humans. This is reflected in the fact that dogs have more complex repertoires of behavior and responses than fish, but less complex ones than humans. (In technical terms, qi is responsible for "speciation.") Furthermore, regardless of how similar they might be in other respects, two French Bulldogs are distinct entities because each has an allotment of qi that occupies a distinct region of space and/or time. (In other words, qi accounts for "individuation.") Finally, even though the two animals in question have qi that is similar enough to make them both French bulldogs, and although they equally and fully possess the Pattern, one may be smarter and have a better temperament than the other because its qi is clearer, allowing the Pattern to manifest itself more fully. (For want of a better term, we might call this function of the qi "characterization.")

p. 188 Although all entities are composites of a shared Pattern that is "speciated," "individuated," and "characterized" by qi, humans are distinct from all other creatures in that the clarity of a person's qi and the quality of his or her character can be changed through individual effort. Humans endowed with turbid qi can choose to clarify their qi and become better people, through ethical cultivation, while those with comparatively clear qi can allow it to become turbid by succumbing to temptation. The view that, despite our differences in aptitude, each of us has a responsibility to strive to become a better person has deep roots in Confucianism. Thus, Kongzi (Confucius) contemptuously dismissed the excuse of a disciple who whined that his "strength is insufficient" to follow

the Way (*Analects* 6.12; discussed in Olberding, 2014). Similarly, Mengzi stated that those who falsely claim that they are incapable of virtue "throw themselves away" (*Mengzi* 4A10).[4]

So how do we go about cultivating ourselves and purifying our qi? One technique is philosophical dialogue. ZHU Xi's recorded dialogues with his students (1986) take up eight volumes, and he criticizes as "lazy" students who are unwilling to disagree with their elders (RLCP: 184). ZHU Xi also stresses the edifying role of studying classic texts, especially the Four Books. ZHU Xi's emphasis on these classics is based on the belief that they provide examples of concrete and specific manifestations of the Pattern. Nonetheless, ZHU Xi was criticized for being too academic and abstract by Confucians like WANG Yangming (as will be discussed). In addition to engaging in dialogue and studying the classic texts, ZHU Xi also thinks that ethical growth occurs through the exercise of one's power of inference (broadly construed). He refers to the relevant kind of inference as "extension," adopting terminology found in another of the Four Books, the *Mengzi*. Mengzi states that we all innately have certain paradigmatic ethical reactions, but we must learn to "extend" these reactions by recognizing the similarities between the situations where we currently have them to those where we do not but should have them. For example, a king spared an ox being led to slaughter out of compassion for its suffering; however, the king's subjects suffered as a result of his wars of aggression and exorbitant taxes. Mengzi suggests that the king must not only recognize the relevant similarity between the innocent, suffering ox and his own innocent, suffering subjects; he must also come to feel the same compassion for his subjects and act appropriately on it (*Mengzi* 1A7; RLCP: 206–7; for a seminal discussion see Nivison, 1996c).

With this background in mind, let us now discuss some possible interpretations of our two canonical texts.

II. The *Great Learning*

According to ZHU, the first of these texts, the *Great Learning*, describes the curriculum that talented students in ancient times
p. 189 followed after completing what was called the "Elementary Learning." Supposedly, ancient ethical education began when young ↳ boys at the age of eight "entered the school of Elementary Learning, where they were educated about the etiquette of 'sweeping and cleaning, responding and replying, entering and exiting,' as well as the adornments of (the Six Arts of) ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy and arithmetic" (Tiwald and Van Norden 2014: 186; slightly modified). At the age of 15, promising students (regardless of social class) entered the school of Great Learning, in which they studied the Pattern that explains and justifies the practices they had acquired through the Elementary Learning. We might say that the Elementary Learning is about the *what* of ethics, while the Great Learning is about the *why*. (We see here an analogy to the distinction made by both Plato and Aristotle between habituating the young into good practices and the genuinely philosophical study of ethics appropriate only to those already raised in the right way.) ZHU Xi believes that the text, the *Great Learning*, is the introductory textbook for this secondary, higher education. (Indeed, "Great Learning" has become the term for "university" in modern Chinese.) According to ZHU Xi, the *Great Learning* consists of a Classic section that is a quotation from Kongzi, followed by a Commentary on it by his disciple Zengzi.

What is perhaps most distinctive of ZHU Xi's interpretation of the *Great Learning* is that he sees it as laying out temporally distinct steps in the process of ethical cultivation. Thus, the Classic section of the *Great Learning* opens, "The Way of Great Learning lies in enlightening one's enlightened Virtue. It lies in renewing the people. It lies in resting in the ultimate good" (Tiwald and Van Norden: 187). ZHU Xi explains that "enlightened Virtue" refers to our natural endowment of the Pattern, which is "receptive, spiritual, and unclouded. It contains the entire Pattern so that it can respond to the myriad kinds of situations. However, it is sometimes darkened, due to the restrictions caused by our endowments of qi and the obscurations of human desires" (RLCP: 187–88). "Enlightening one's enlightened Virtue" refers to overcoming these "obscurations" and rediscovering one's innate knowledge. To the extent that we successfully cultivate ourselves, we can proceed to the next step in ethical cultivation, "renewing the people," which refers to helping others, especially facilitating their own ethical development. Finally, "resting in the ultimate good" is continuing the self-cultivation process until we develop virtues so stable that one will never "deviate so much as the breadth of a hair due to the selfishness of human desires" (RLCP: 188).

Already in the first line we see that the *Great Learning* stresses the intimate connection between the ethical cultivation of the individual and the well-being of society as a whole. This point is reinforced in the famous "chain argument" of the following

passage:

> The ancients who desired to enlighten the enlightened Virtue of the world would first put their states in order. Those who desired to put their states in order would first regulate their families. Those who desired to regulate their families would first cultivate their selves. Those who desired to cultivate their selves would first correct their minds. Those who desired to correct their minds would first make their thoughts have Sincerity. Those who desired to make their thoughts have Sincerity would first extend their knowledge. Extending knowledge lies in getting a handle on things. (RLCP: 188–89)

p. 190 "Getting a handle on things" (*gé wù* 格物), which results in "extending knowledge," is thus the foundation for the ethical cultivation process. Unfortunately, the *Great Learning* itself never tells us what "getting a handle on things" is. ZHU Xi thinks there was originally a section of the *Great Learning* that explained the concept in detail but is now lost. However, with the confidence that only a true believer could have, he helpfully tells us what the missing section said:

> the human mind is sentient and never fails to have knowledge, while the things of the world never fail to have the Pattern. It is only because the Pattern is not yet exhaustively investigated that knowledge is not fully fathomed…. When one has exerted effort for a long time, one day, like something suddenly cracking open, one will know in a manner that binds it all together. Then there will be nothing one fails to get to, whether inner or outer, refined or coarse, and the complete Substance and great Function of our mind will never fail to be enlightened. This is what is called "getting a handle on things." This is what is meant by "the ultimate of knowledge." (RLCP: 191)

In other words, "getting a handle on things" is the process by which we come to discover more and more of the Pattern that structures the universe. To the extent that one successfully "gets a handle on things," one "extends one's knowledge." As ZHU Xi makes clear in his preface to the work, knowledge here is primarily moral knowledge, knowledge of "what [people] should do according to their personal responsibilities" (modified from RLCF: 186). Since the Pattern of the universe is also present within us as our own nature, ethical knowledge is intrinsically motivating. Those few who have achieved sagehood will find their motivations perfectly in accord with their beliefs.[5] However, for the vast majority of us who have not achieved sagehood, our knowledge can be temporarily obscured by tempting desires and strong passions.[6] In other words, weakness of the will (*akrasia*) is possible: "When people know something but their actions don't accord with it, their knowledge is still shallow" (RLCP: 181).

A person whose motivations match his ethical beliefs has achieved the state of *chéng* 誠, conventionally translated as "Sincerity" in English. In an extremely evocative metaphor, the *Great Learning* states, " 'making thoughts have Sincerity' is to let there be no self-deception. It is like hating a hateful odor, or loving a lovely sight" (RLCP: 191). The phrase "a lovely sight" in English is likely to conjure up the pleasant but tepid reaction we have to a beautiful sunset; however, it is important to recognize that the phrase "like loving a lovely sight" (如好好色 *rú hào hǎo sè*) suggests sexual attachment.[7] Disliking a bad odor and being drawn to someone sexually attractive are here taken as analogies for hating evil and loving the good, because in both cases perception and motivation are in perfect harmony. To recognize an odor as disgusting (perception) is to be repulsed by it (motivation); to recognize someone as sexually attractive (perception) is to be drawn to him or her (motivation). Similarly, someone who has achieved Sincerity will be viscerally repulsed by evil and drawn to the good.

ZHU Xi argues that the *Great Learning* distinguishes between achieving Sincerity and extending ethical knowledge: "The Classic
p. 191 section says, 'Those who desired to make ↳ their thoughts have Sincerity would first extend their knowledge.' But it also says, 'Only after knowledge has reached the ultimate do thoughts have Sincerity' " (RLCP: 192–93). ZHU Xi first considers a case in which one has failed to extend knowledge: "Suppose one has not fully fathomed the enlightenment of the mind's Substance. In this case, there will be some expressions of the mind on which one is incapable of genuinely making an effort, so that one is reckless and deceives oneself" (RLCP: 193). ZHU Xi distinguishes this from a case in which one *has* extended knowledge but has not yet achieved Sincerity: "Nonetheless, one may already be enlightened, but not be attentive to it. Then one does not fully possess one's own enlightenment, and one lacks the foundation for advancing in Virtue…. the sequence may not be disordered, and no steps can be skipped" (RLCP: 193). In order to preserve one's moral knowledge in the face of temptations and distractions, one must maintain reverential attention (*jìng* 敬), a kind of mental focus on the Pattern. ZHU Xi elsewhere describes this focus as "simply to collect

one's spirit and focus it on one thing" (RLCP: 179). If we can maintain reverential attention, our *knowledge* of evil will match our *motivation* to avoid it, and our *knowledge* of the good will match our *motivation* to pursue it.

But in what sense is it true that " 'making thoughts have Sincerity' is to let there be no self-deception"? On ZHU Xi's account, an individual person is the Pattern embodied in a particular endowment of qi, and manifesting Virtue is acting in accordance with the Pattern within oneself. Consequently, someone who succumbs to weakness of will is divided within herself, while the Virtuous person has a sort of integrity or unity. Let's consider a concrete example. John is a student with an essay due tomorrow. As he is writing the essay, a friend drops by and invites him to play a video game. If John has already cultivated a stable disposition to "reverently attend to" his activities, he will be engrossed in writing the essay and will not be tempted. (Because John has come to "rest in the highest good," he is motivated to complete his essay on time as strongly and spontaneously as "loving a lovely sight.") However, if John is like most of us, he at least feels the temptation to play the video game. At this point, John must decide whether or not to maintain "reverential attentiveness." If he maintains reverence, he will actively keep his mind focused on the essay and on the Pattern (i.e., his obligation to do his homework). If he allows his reverence to lapse, John will become passive to his nonmoral desires and will allow himself to forget his obligation to work on the essay.[8] This is intrinsically "self-deception," since John is choosing to conceal part of himself (his moral knowledge) from his current awareness. However, it can also be facilitated by self-deceptive rationalizations: "I deserve a break," "I'll play *just one level*," and so on. (Obviously, there could also be a professor, Susan, with papers to grade, who succumbs to a parallel moral failure.)

The preceding account seems very voluntaristic, in the sense that one need simply to choose to focus on one's moral knowledge, which will result in acting out of Virtue. There certainly is a voluntaristic aspect to Confucian ethics in general. (Kongzi said, "Is benevolence far away? I simply desire benevolence and here it is!" [*Analects* 7.30; see also Nivison 1996b, 1996d].) But ZHU Xi's
p. 192 interpretation also stresses the aspirational aspects ↳ of Confucianism. We strive to *become* the kind of person who effortlessly and spontaneously does the right thing out of the right motivation. In addition, ZHU Xi's emphasis on the need to extend one's knowledge and read the classics in order to "get a handle on things" suggests that some kinds of knowledge (and hence ethical agency) may be beyond the reach of those with lower levels of ethical cultivation. We find a more resolutely voluntaristic formulation of Confucianism in the thought of WANG Yangming.

WANG Yangming challenged several aspects of ZHU Xi's interpretation of the *Great Learning*. In particular, WANG Yangming disagrees with ZHU about how to understand the metaphor that being Sincere is "like loving a lovely sight, like hating a hateful odor," the chain argument of the Classic section, and the concept of "getting a handle on things." These specific disagreements are reflections of a fundamental difference in orientation. ZHU Xi sees in the *Great Learning* a guide to *becoming* ethical through a process with temporally distinct stages, whereas WANG Yangming finds in it an account of *being* ethical, a unified activity within the reach of everyone. Although ZHU Xi and WANG Yangming agree that humans innately have complete ethical knowledge, ZHU Xi holds that almost all of us are born with physical desires that are so strong and amoral that we cannot reliably exercise our moral knowledge without an arduous process of ethical cultivation. WANG Yangming acknowledges the challenge posed by our sensual desires but believes that all humans have the capacity to access their innate moral knowledge if they choose to do so, and that knowledge always successfully motivates moral action. In other words, WANG Yangming denies the possibility of weakness of will (*akrasia*).

WANG Yangming expresses his denial of weakness of will with his famous slogan of the "unity of knowing and acting" (*zhī xíng hé yī* 知行合一):

> people today … separate knowing and acting into two distinct tasks to perform and think that one must first know and only then can one act. They say, "Now I will perform the task of knowing, by studying and learning. Once I have attained real knowledge, I then will pursue the task of acting." And so, till the end of their days, they never act, and till the end of their days, they never know. This is not a minor malady, nor did it arrive just yesterday. My current teaching regarding the unity of knowing and acting is a medicine directed precisely at this disease. (RLCP: 268)

WANG Yangming has the followers of ZHU Xi in mind as those who "separate knowing and acting." ZHU Xi himself does suggest that there is some distinction between the two:

> Knowledge and action always need each other. It's like how eyes cannot walk without feet, but feet cannot see without eyes. If we discuss them in terms of their sequence, knowledge comes first. But if we discuss them in terms of importance, action is what is important. (RLCP: 180–81)

ZHU Xi's interpretation of the *Great Learning* is framed in these terms. One first knows what the ethical Pattern is (by "getting a handle on things") and then makes this ↳ knowledge motivationally effective (through "reverential attention"). On this view, Sincerity, the state in which one loves the good like loving a lovely sight and hates evil like hating a hateful odor, is an *achievement*, the goal that results from successful ethical cultivation.

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In contrast, WANG Yangming thinks that the "sight" and "odor" metaphor illustrates the very *beginning* of ethical cognition and motivation. He presents three major lines of argument for his interpretation. First, he draws an analogy between knowing that something is wrong and knowing that an odor is repugnant:

> There never have been people who know but do not act. Those who "know" but do not act simply do not yet know…. Thus, the *Great Learning* gives us examples of true knowing and acting, saying it is "like loving a lovely sight" or "like hating a hateful odor." … Smelling a hateful odor is a case of knowing, while hating a hateful odor is a case of acting. As soon as one smells that hateful odor, one naturally hates it. It is not as if you first smell it and only then, intentionally, you decide to hate it. Consider the case of a person with a stuffed-up nose. Even if he sees a malodorous object right in front of him, the smell does not reach him, and so he does not hate it. This is simply not to know the hateful odor. (RLCP: 267)

Another line of argument that Wang gives for the "unity of knowing and acting" is that merely verbal assent is inadequate to demonstrate knowledge:

> One cannot say he knows filial piety or brotherly respect simply because he knows how to *say* something filial or brotherly. Knowing pain offers another good example. One must have experienced pain oneself in order to know pain. Similarly, one must have experienced cold oneself in order to know cold, and one must have experienced hunger oneself in order to know hunger. How can knowing and acting be separated? (RLCP: 267)

Perhaps Wang's most compelling line of argument is a pragmatic one about the aim or purpose behind discussing knowing and acting. He allows that it may be useful and legitimate to discuss knowing separately from acting or acting separately from knowing, but only in order to address the failings of specific kinds of individuals. On the one hand, "there is a type of person in the world who foolishly acts upon impulse without engaging in the slightest thought or reflection. Because they always act blindly and recklessly, it is necessary to talk to them about knowing …," without emphasizing acting (RLCP: 268). On the other hand, "[t]here is also a type of person who is vague and irresolute; they engage in speculation while suspended in a vacuum and are unwilling to apply themselves to any concrete actions" (RLCP: 268). These latter people benefit from advice that emphasizes action, without necessarily discussing knowledge. However, those in Wang's era who distinguish knowledge and action "separate knowing and acting into two distinct tasks to perform and think that one must first know and only then can one act" (RLCP: 268). As a result, they become nothing more than pedantic bookworms, ↳ who study ethics without ever living up to its ideals or trying to achieve positive change in the world around them.[9]

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One problem with Wang's interpretation of the *Great Learning* is how to deal with the "chain argument" of the Classic section, which repeatedly uses the locution, "Those who desired … would first … " Prima facie, this phrasing suggests a temporal sequence. However, Wang argues that what the *Great Learning* is describing are aspects of one process that are distinct conceptually, but not temporally:

> Now, we can say that "self," "mind," "thoughts," "knowledge," and "things" describe the sequence of spiritual training. While each has its own place, in reality they are but a single thing. We can say that "getting a handle," "extending," "making Sincere," "correcting," and "cultivating" describe the sequence of spiritual training used in the course of this sequence. While each has its own name, in reality they are but a single affair. (RLCP: 247)[10]

So far, we have seen that WANG Yangming challenges ZHU Xi's interpretation of the metaphor of Sincerity as being "like loving a lovely sight," and ZHU Xi's reading of the "chain argument." WANG Yangming also argues for a different understanding of the claim that "The extension of knowledge lies in getting a handle on things (*ge wu*)." As we have seen, ZHU Xi interprets "getting a handle on things" as coming to have new knowledge (more precisely, rediscovering the knowledge that one has innately). In contrast, WANG Yangming marshals philological evidence to argue that "getting a handle on things" means "correcting things," both in the sense of having the right beliefs and motivations about a situation and in the sense of dealing with that situation appropriately. He explains,

> A "thing" is a task or affair…. To "get a handle on" is to correct. It refers to correcting whatever is not correct and returning to what is correct. Correcting whatever is not correct means to get rid of what is bad. Returning to what is correct means to do what is good. This is what it means to "get a handle on" something. (RLCP: 248–49).

In other words, on Wang's interpretation, "getting a handle on things" is simply exercising the practical knowledge that one already has, rather than discovering something new. David S. Nivison aptly summarized the differences between the views of Zhu and Wang: "We might say that Wang's 'extending' of knowledge is more like extending one's arm than, say, extending one's vocabulary" (1996d: 225).[11]

ZHU Xi's interpretation became the orthodox one, and the basis for the civil service examinations for 600 years (see Gardner 2007: xxi–xxx). Consequently, his influence has been immense, and even today many interpreters follow him by rendering "ge wu" as "investigating things," even when translating WANG Yangming (who explicitly rejects this interpretation). However, there is as much textual evidence for WANG Yangming's reading as there is for ZHU Xi's. Thus, Nivison wrote that "ge wu" "is a philologist's delight.
p. 195 No one will ever know what it really meant in its *locus classicus*" (1996d: 225). ↳ Consequently, Tiwald and Van Norden have suggested the translation "getting a handle on things," which is awkward in English but reflects the provocative ambiguity of the original Chinese (RLCP: xii).

III. The *Mean*

The *Mean*, which ZHU Xi attributed to Kongzi's grandson, Zisi, is valuable in part because it is one of the few ancient Confucian texts to provide explicit definitions. It opens: " 'Nature' means what is mandated by Heaven. The 'Way' means following one's nature. 'Education' means cultivating the Way." Although Heaven can have supernatural associations in ancient Chinese thought (Cline, 2014), ZHU Xi understands "Heaven" here as the natural processes through which the Pattern is manifested:

> Heaven generates the myriad things in accordance with *yin*, *yang*, and the Five Phases, and gives them form with *qi.* It also endows them with the Pattern, which is the same as mandating them [to be a certain way]…. This is what is meant by the "nature" (RLCP: 221; gloss in original).

Consequently, human nature is what is "mandated" for us based on the Pattern we share with all other humans; living ethically (following the Way) is acting in accordance with this Pattern; education is cultivating our character so that we follow the Way.

The next section of the *Mean* is intriguing but cries out for commentarial exegesis:

> (1) The Way is something that one cannot depart from for even a moment. If one could depart from it, it would not be the Way. (2) For this reason, the gentleman is careful even before he sees anything; he is concerned even before he hears anything. (3) Nothing is more evident than what is hidden; nothing is more manifest than what is subtle. Hence, the gentleman is careful even when alone. (4) When happiness, anger, sadness and joy have not yet been expressed, it is called the "mean." (5) When they are expressed but all hit the right points, it is called "harmony." (6) The mean is the great foundation of the world. Harmony is the universal Way of the world. If one achieves the mean and harmony, Heaven and Earth will find their places, and the myriad things will be nurtured. (RLCP: 221–22; numbering modified)

ZHU Xi's interpretation of this passage is subtle and psychologically profound. He argues that the "mean" here refers to a state in which one can access the underlying Pattern that structures the universe (which is identical with human nature), prior to its manifestation in perception ("even before he sees anything") and motivation ("when happiness, anger, sadness and joy have not yet been expressed"). This is "the great foundation of the world." The very instant that this Pattern becomes manifest is a critical
p. 196 moment ("nothing is more manifest than what is subtle") because this is a crucial opportunity ↳ to avoid (or succumb to) self-deception ("hence, the gentleman is careful even when alone"). ZHU Xi amplifies this point in his commentary on verse (3):

> even in darkness or in the most trifling of affairs, when the signs of something have not yet taken concrete form, there is already incipient activity…. For this reason, a gentleman is constantly on guard and devotes special effort to nipping his human desires in the bud, not allowing them to grow in private, lest he end up far from the Way (RLCP: 221–22).

A person who exercises "reverential attention" will identify motivations for what they are, whether virtuous or vicious, and achieve the state of "harmony," in which motivations "are expressed but all hit the right points." This is "the universal Way of the world." Since the Pattern is one and the same in everything, when we act in accordance with it, we promote not only our own well-being but that of everyone else: "Heaven and Earth will find their places, and the myriad things will be nurtured." We can represent ZHU Xi's interpretation graphically as follows:

Ontology	Psychology	Ethical State	Text
Pattern in itself (Substance)	**Calmness prior to sensory stimulation**	**Mean**	**(2) "the gentleman is careful even before he sees anything; he is concerned even before he hears anything." This is (4) "when happiness, anger, sadness and joy have not yet been expressed."**
Manifestations of the Pattern (Function)	**Control of incipient emotions and desires**	**Harmony**	**(3) "Nothing is more evident than what is hidden; nothing is more manifest than what is subtle. Hence, the gentleman is careful even when alone," so that (5) "when [emotions] are expressed … all hit the right points."**

Cultivating our ability to follow the Way leads naturally to a discussion of virtue, and the *Mean* supplies definitions of several key Confucian virtues: "Benevolence [*rén* 仁] is being a human [*rén* 人], and its greatest form is being kind to one's kin. Righteousness [*yì* 義] is appropriateness [*yí* 宜], and its greatest form is respecting the worthy" (RLCP: 225; characters added). These definitions are partially justified by homonymy, but they are also semantically important: benevolence is the fullest expression of what it is to be a "human" and is paradigmatically manifested in our concerns for "others" (another meaning of *ren* 人), particularly family
p. 197 members; righteousness is what is "appropriate" ↳ for the social role one occupies, particularly insofar as these roles express hierarchical relationships based on merit. Examples of such social roles include "the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and friends" (RLCP: 225). These particular examples can be seen as paradigms of, respectively, relationships between supervisors and subordinates (boss and employee, dean and faculty, etc.), caregivers and the cared-for (parents and children, nurse and patient, etc.), romantic partners, hierarchical relationships with fewer explicit obligations (senior and junior members of any organization, etc.), and caring relationships that are neither romantic nor hierarchical.

After defining benevolence and righteousness, the *Mean* continues: "Ritual grows out of the differences in being kind to one's kin, and the gradations in respecting the worthy" (RLCP: 225). Rituals are the conventional practices that express and reinforce the commitments to the relationships characteristic of benevolence and righteousness. They include everything from formal ceremonies (weddings, funerals) to matters of everyday etiquette (shaking hands when meeting someone, raising one's hand to ask a question in class).[12] Part of what rituals do is to specify the obligations associated with social roles. The ethical importance of such roles is

suggested by a passage that begins with Kongzi citing the adage "Do not inflict upon others what you would be unwilling to accept if it were inflicted upon yourself" (RLCP, 224; cf. *Analects* 15.24), and then lamenting,

> There are four aspects to the Way of a gentleman, and I, Kong, have been unable to attain even one. "Serve one's father with what one seeks from his own son"—I have been unable to do this. "Serve one's ruler with what one seeks from one's own ministers"—I have been unable to do this. "Serve one's elder brother with what one seeks from one's younger brother"—I have been unable to do this. "First do for one's friends what one seeks from them"—I have been unable to do this. (RLCP: 224)

Passages such as this have led some interpreters to argue that Confucianism gives us a way of overcoming the limitations inherent in the ethical principle of reciprocity (*shù* 恕 in Chinese). This principle can be formulated in various ways, including the negative formulation discussed earlier ("Do not inflict … what you would be unwilling … ") and positive formulations ("And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" [Luke 6:31 KJV]). Reciprocity seems to capture an important aspect of our ethical intuitions. However, it may be argued that it is too abstract to provide correct guidance in many cases. If I am a lazy teacher, should I give undemanding assignments to my students, because that is what I would want if I were a lazy student? Presumably not, but then it seems that the principle of reciprocity requires some independent moral standard that tells us what it means to apply it correctly. One suggestion is that we apply reciprocity in the light of the social roles that we occupy, which will allow us to formulate more specific and reliable understandings of what we owe to others, and what we may legitimately expect of them. If I think of what
p. 198 I am supposed to do qua teacher, it is not hard to recognize that my obligation is to provide assignments that are pedagogically ↳ valuable even if they are challenging (and even if that means more work for both me and my students). Reciprocity, vividly imagining myself in the place of another, still plays an important role. For example, imagining how I felt about teachers I did not respect can help motivate me to do my best in fulfilling my role. Phrased in ZHU Xi's terms, I "extend knowledge" by coming to understand the obligations associated with various social roles and by imaginatively putting myself in the place of others who are the counterparts to the roles I occupy. Once I understand what my obligations are, my ethical task will often amount to nothing more than maintaining focus on what my role-specific obligations are (i.e., maintaining "Sincerity" through "reverential attention").[13]

Of course, the role-based approach to reciprocity is not without its problems. In itself, it provides no mechanism for ensuring that the roles are just. For example, the traditional Confucian conception of the roles of "wife" and "mother" is sexist. In addition, a role-based approach to reciprocity runs the danger of ignoring social outcasts (the homeless, those with severe mental illnesses, etc.), who no longer occupy any standard social role. Finally, focusing simply on the roles may lead us to ignore the way in which factors like gender and race influence how we respond to the occupants of certain roles. Martha Nussbaum is surely right that limitations like these are partly due to the "missing thought … that many of the most important distinctions among human beings are the work of fortune, unconnected to human desert" (Nussbaum 2003: 9). These are points that we must not lose sight of. However, I submit that relationships between supervisors and subordinates, caregivers and the cared-for, mentors and mentees, romantic partners, and friends are parts of anything recognizable as a human form of life. Furthermore, for most of us in everyday life, one of our most common sources of wrongdoing is simply a failure to attend to our role-specific obligations.

The *Mean* includes a list of cardinal virtues: "Wisdom, benevolence and courage—these three things—are the universal Virtues of the world" (RLCP: 225). This is historically important, as it is perhaps the earliest text in which "Virtue" (德 *dé*) is unambiguously used as a countable noun referring to good states of character. ZHU Xi gives a functional account of how these three allow one to follow the Way: "Wisdom is that by means of which one knows this [Way]. Benevolence is that by means of which one embodies this. Courage is that by means of which one is firm in this" (RLCP: 225).[14]

After introducing the preceding "universal Virtues," the *Mean* comments, "But that by means of which one puts them into action is one" (RLCP: 225). Zhu Xi suggests that the "one" that these virtues depend upon is Sincerity, and this is consistent with the considerable attention that the *Mean* devotes to this topic. As we saw with the *Great Learning*, part of Sincerity is avoiding the self-deception that makes weakness of will possible. The *Mean* expands the concept of Sincerity, making it a fundamental aspect of the metaphysics of the universe: "Sincerity is the beginning of things, and it is their end. Without Sincerity, there are no things" (RLCP: 229). Intuitively, we can think of Sincerity as the integrity something has when it actually is what it ought to be. A fine porcelain bowl in perfect condition is precisely what it should be, so it has complete Sincerity. If the bowl is broken, it no longer has integrity as a bowl. However, the pieces of the bowl have integrity as shards of porcelain; they are perfectly what they are qua fragments. In

p. 199 general, ↳ anything that exists must have structure of some kind (the Pattern), so it must possess some degree of integrity between what it is and that structure. This integrity is Sincerity.

As we have seen, the *Great Learning* and the *Mean* have proven to be immensely stimulating for philosophers in the Confucian tradition. But why should contemporary Western philosophers be interested in these texts? Empirical research suggests that the techniques for studying philosophy used in the Western academy have little to no effect on the ethics or characters of philosophy professors or their students (Schwitzgebel 2014; Schwitzgebel and Rust 2014a, 2014b; Schwitzgebel, Cokelet, and Singer 2020). Some philosophers will shrug this off with the claim that it is not the job of professors to make their students better people. This is unsatisfying for several reasons, though. Historically, most philosophers (from Socrates and Confucius to Rawls and HU Shih) have thought that philosophy is something more than a rarefied intellectual parlor game, or a kind of intellectual calisthenics that trains the mind for whatever purpose the client chooses (like the instruction offered by the Sophists). Furthermore, my own experience is that, when pressed to justify their profession, most Western philosophy professors *do* claim that they make their students better citizens in some way. For example, it is common to hear that the study of Western philosophy makes students more open-minded, or better at critical thinking, or more socially responsible (see, e.g., Russell 1988: 153–61). But if any one of these things is our goal, it makes a difference whether our students can connect the skills and knowledge they have acquired in the classroom to effective moral agency outside the classroom.

If edification of some kind is a worthwhile goal, but we are not currently achieving it, what should we do? Perhaps Western philosophers could draw inspiration from the suggestions of the *Great Learning* and the *Mean* about the psychology of ethical failure and the importance of social roles in understanding one's obligations to others. Perhaps each of us should become, if just for a while, "a pilgrim and learner, who would listen attentively to the text unfolding itself through insider interpretations and figure out what he and his community can learn from it" (Wang 2008: 15; cited in Johnston and Wang 2012: 15).

Notes

1. The most plausible view is that they date from no earlier than the third century BCE and are of uncertain authorship; see Johnston and Wang (2012: 1–15). For a critical overview of various translations see Van Norden (2013).

2. See Gardner (2007: xii–xxx).

3. Qi (variously translated as "psychophysical stuff," "ether," and in other equally unsatisfactory ways) differs from matter as it is classically conceived because it is self-generating and can have mental properties (see the helpful discussion in Schwartz 1985: 179–84). Qi cannot exist independently of the Pattern, because the latter structures the former, but Pattern also cannot exist without being instantiated in qi.

4. For more detailed discussions of Zhu Xi's metaphysics and theory of ethical cultivation, see Gardner (1990, 2007: 131–47); Van Norden (2004); RLCP: 170–84.

p. 200 5. The language ZHU Xi uses to describe the achievement of this goal is reminiscent of Buddhist enlightenment ("one day, like something suddenly cracking open, one will know in a manner that binds it all together"). ZHU Xi thinks the dialogue between Kongzi and his disciple Zengzi in *Analects* 4.15 records the moment when the latter achieved this insight, and ZHU Xi interprets is as almost like a kōan exchange (see Van Norden 2002: 231–32).

6. The *Great Learning* gives examples of this: "What is meant by the claim that cultivating one's self lies in correcting one's mind is that, if the mind is angry about something, one will not be able to make it correct; if one is frightened of something, then one will not be able to make it correct; if one is fond of something, then one will not be able to make it correct; if one is anxious about something, then one will not be able to make it correct" (RLCP: 193).

7. Compare *Analects* 9.18: "I have never seen a man who loves Virtue *like he loves sex*" (*rú hào sè* 如好色).

8. *Mengzi* 6A15 is the source of the view that in cases of moral failure we become passive to our sensual desires.

9. For a critique of Wang's arguments, see Van Norden (2014).

10. For an insightful critique of Wang's interpretation, see Shun (2011).

11. For more detailed accounts of Wang's philosophy, see Nivison (1996b, 1996d); Ivanhoe (2002, 2009); Van Norden (2014).

12. On the complex role of ritual in Confucianism, see Radcliffe-Brown (1965); Fingarette (1972); Schwartz (1985: 67–75); Shun (2002). For a defense of the philosophical importance of etiquette, see Stohr (2012).

13. As Justin Tiwald observes, ZHU Xi suggests just such an approach (2011). Fingarette (1980) is a seminal recent formulation of this view, but see also Nivison (1996a); Ivanhoe (2008).

14. One puzzle is how to reconcile this list of cardinal virtues with the more common neo-Confucian list of benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety (adapted from *Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6, etc.).

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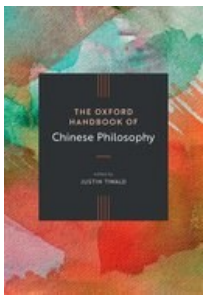

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CHAPTER

10 Virtuous Contempt (*wù*惡) in the *Analects*

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Abstract

This chapter argues that understanding the role of despising or contempt in the *Analects* is important in appreciating Kongzi's (or Confucius's) *dào* in two related though distinct ways. First, and despite interpretations to the contrary, the *Analects* portrays morally exemplary individuals (such as the nobleman) as despising and holding certain individuals in contempt. Thus, contempt is a proper form of moral judgment for moral exemplars. Second, reflecting on the *targets* of contempt in the text helps to uncover some of the tacit worries that Kongzi may have had concerning his own teachings on self-cultivation. Specifically, trying to embody Kongzi's teachings—including mastering the ritual minutiae of the waning Zhou high culture—risks making one pedantic, pretentious, and glib, and this helps understand why such individuals are held out for particular contempt in the text. Finally, the chapter puts forward a number of general reasons why certain negatively valenced emotions such as contempt might be considered morally laudable.

Keywords: contempt, despising, moral judgment, Analects, Kongzi, Confucius, moral exemplars, self-cultivation

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> Hate here means dislike, without any connotation of ill will. —Wing-tsit CHAN, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*
>
> When you love a man you want him to live;
>
> when you despise him you want him to die.
>
> —Kongzi, *Analects* 12.10 (12.10/31/30)[1]

I. Introduction

Much is said about what Kongzi (Confucius) liked or cherished. Kongzi revered the rituals of the Zhou. He cherished tradition and classical music. He loved the *Odes*. He enjoyed a good swim. Far less is said, however, about what he despised or held in contempt (*wù* 惡). Yet contempt appears in the oldest stratum of the *Analects* as a disposition or virtue of moral exemplars. We are told, rather unambiguously, that "only the humane (仁 *rén*) person can love others, or despise them" (*Analects* 4.3). Nevertheless, the virtue of contempt is seldom discussed in the secondary literature; more prominent are discussions of other virtues, such as being loyal, filial, or sincere.

In this chapter, I will argue that understanding the role of despising or contempt in the *Analects* is important in appreciating Kongzi's *dào* (or guiding way of life) in two related though distinct ways. First, I will argue that in parts of the *Analects* morally exemplary individuals (such as the nobleman) are described as capable or despising or holding certain individuals in contempt. Second, I will suggest that reflecting on the *targets* of contempt in the text might help to uncover some of the tacit worries that Kongzi may have
p. 206 had concerning his own teachings on self-cultivation. Specifically, I will argue that those ↳ trying to embody Kongzi's teachings—including mastering the ritual minutiae of the waning Zhou high culture—risk becoming pedantic, pretentious, and glib, and that this helps us understand why pedantic, pretentious, and glib individuals are held out for particular contempt in the text. In the concluding section, I state more general reasons why we might consider certain negatively valenced emotions such as contempt to be morally laudable.

II. *wù* in the *Analects*

The first instances of the character *wù* 惡 occur in Book IV of the *Analects*, considered to be part of the earliest stratum of the text—perhaps its historical core. I will examine them in turn.

> 子曰：「唯仁者，能好人，能惡人。」
>
> The Master said, "Only the humane [*rén*] person can love (*hào* 好) people, and despise (*wù* 惡) them." (4.3/7/9)

There are two things to note here at the outset. First, throughout this paper, I will be translating *wù* as "despising" when used as a verb and "contempt" when used as a noun.[2] By contrast, nearly all of the scholars and commentators I will discuss translate it as "hate" and "hatred." These latter terms can be misleading. Hatred can give the impression of visceral dislike or hostility without any judgment as to the true merits of the target of one's hatred.[3] However, contempt (and cognates such as disdain and scorn) suggests that the target of one's attitude is base, vile, or unworthy. It thus includes an evaluative dimension, which is crucial to understanding *wù* in the *Analects*. As we shall see, the type of scorn and contempt that we find in the text is clearly toward individuals who are judged to merit these attitudes owing to questionable or vicious aspects of their character.

Second, the word "only" (*wéi* 唯) is this passage makes it clear that "loving" and "despising" should be understood as "properly loving" and "properly despising." After all, each of us is certainly *capable* of feeling love and contempt, so without the qualifier "only" the passage would seem to be uninformative. Now, Kongzi does not say that the humane person will *in fact* love or despise others, only that he is able to do so justifiably or accurately. Nevertheless, it seems hard to read the passage as suggesting a mere capacity to experience such emotions. Rather, this passage seems to maintain that, whereas all of us can feel love and contempt, only a *rén* person targets these emotions correctly.

Even though this is a standard way of parsing the passage, there is no consensus on how to make sense of the passage so parsed. Some more or less agree that the passage should be understood as claiming that only the humane person loves and despises properly.
p. 207 For example, Chichung HUANG notes that the humane person "loves good men ↳ and loathes evil men" (Huang 1997: 67), thus making the evaluative dimensions obvious. Similarly, Brooks and Brooks comment that *rén* (what I am translating as humane) "is not niceness, though it evolves in that direction. It confers a capacity to judge others…. Enthusiasm for right implies antagonism (hatred, *wù* 惡) for its opposite" (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 13). They add that "hatred, like courage, is a classic virtue … directed at

rivals … but mostly the standard crowd: carpers, whiners, swaggerers, bullies; the specious, pushy, and insinuating" (Brooks and Brooks 1998: 165).

Others draw a distinction between "despising others" and "despising them with malice," suggesting that what distinguishes the humane person from others is that they have no ill will or strong emotions toward the targets of their disdain. Edward Slingerland, for example, draws on the commentarial tradition and argues that the humane person judges others accurately and impartially, and is thus "able to love virtue in others without envy and despise vice in others without malice" (Slingerland 2003a: 30).

Some take this line of reasoning further, arguing that not only is there an absence of malice in the humane person, but also an absence of any negative or aversive reactions at all. According to Yong HUANG,

> Confucius claimed that "only a person of *rén* knows how to love people and hate people" … from the Confucian point of view, "hate," just as "love," is a kind of love in a more general sense. On the one hand, the most fundamental meaning of *rén* is to love, and so the person of *rén* who knows how to love and hate is a loving person; on the other hand, as Wing-tsit CHAN already pointed out, "hate" here does not have any connotation of ill will (see Chan 1963: 25n53). It is rather one's profound feeling of regret that one's beloved moral patient lacks what it should have. So, the reason that Confucianism wants to make distinction or discrimination is not to decide whom or what we should love or love more and whom or what we should not love or love less; it is rather to decide how to love everyone and everything in ways most appropriate to the person or thing. (Huang 2005: 39)

Huang offers a slightly different interpretation here. He draws a parallel with the Confucian doctrine of loving with distinctions—where one is to love one's family foremost, and then one's neighbors, village, prefecture, and so on, for all people in variegated ways and according to the distance of the relation. Thus, according to Huang, *wù* in *Analects* 4.3 is not a feeling distinct from love at all. Instead, it is a highly attenuated and regretful form of love for those outside one's moral circle (and perhaps beyond one's ability to influence or improve).

In his paper, Huang cites Wing-tsit CHAN's interpretation of this passage in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963), where Chan claims that *wù* is best understood as disliking someone without any connotation of ill will. But disliking seems inapt, as it can suggest a mere preference with no strong aversive or evaluative dimension. One can dislike almost anything, and disliking can coexist with attitudes of neutrality or tolerance toward the target. To further elaborate the meaning of *wù*, Chan directs the reader to a
p. 208 well-known passage in the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), which describes a ↳ minister who is a danger to his realm. His actions are deplorable: instead of exalting men of worth, this minister envies their skills and talents and blocks their advancement at every turn. Through such actions, he threatens to undermine the administration of the empire, putting everyone in jeopardy. In such a situation, we are told that

> 唯仁人放流之，迸諸四夷，不與同中國，此謂唯仁人為能愛人，能惡人。見賢而不能舉，舉而不能先，命也；見不善而不能退，退而不能遠，過也。好人之所惡，惡人之所好，是謂拂人之性，災必逮夫身。
>
> Only a man who is *rén* will send away and banish such a person, driving him off to the four barbarians, and refusing to dwell together with him in the Middle Kingdom. This is to say that only a man who is *rén* is able to love others and able to despise others. To see one who is worthy and yet not be able to advance him, or to advance him but not be able to give him priority, is to be remiss. To see someone who is not good and yet not be able to dismiss him, or to dismiss him but not be able to cast him far away, is a fault. To love what other people despise, or to despise what other people love is called going against the nature of persons and will inevitably bring disaster upon oneself. (modified from Johnston and Ping 2012: 171–72)

Chan's interpretation is, in one sense, consistent with this passage, insofar as there is no explicit indication of malice toward such contemptible ministers. Nonetheless, we have more than disliking here. A natural reading of this passage is that the truly virtuous man banishes such ministers from the realm because his attitude toward them is not simply one of disliking, but one of contempt for having so blatantly endangered the realm. Indeed, one can argue that failing to feel contempt toward such a despicable minister would mark a moral defect rather than a laudable trait of character. While dismissing a minister and banishing them from the realm

aligns with despising their presence, it falls short of deliberate intentions to harm them physically. So, even while this passage may reflect an absence of malice, it fails to support Chan's reading that *wù* in *Analects* 4.3 is a form of disliking, even if we grant that *wù* precludes malice.

Yet such deflationary readings—ones that diminish the emotional intensity of *wù*—abound. Many try to finesse away any real force behind the despising mentioned in this passage.[4] According to TU Wei-ming, for example,

> only those of *jen* [*rén* 仁, benevolent, humane] know how to love men and how to hate them (4.3), for the feelings of love and hate can be impartially expressed as fitting responses to concrete situations only by those who have reached the highest level of morality. This is predicated on the moral principle that those who sincerely strive to become *jen* abstain from evil will (or, if you wish, hatred); as a result, they can respond to a value-laden and emotion-charged situation in a disinterested but compassionate manner. The paradox, rather than obscurity, is quite understandable in terms of Confucius' characterization of the hyperhonest villager as the spoiler of virtue (17.13). A man often refuses to tolerate evil because he has no evil will toward others; his ability to hate is thus a true indication that he has no penned up hatred in his heart. (Tu 1981: 49)

p. 209 There are many remarkable features of Tu's interpretation. In addition to stressing that love and hate are arrived at impartially (which seems plausible), Tu claims that this passage is not about *persons* but about *concrete situations*. This seems plainly false; Kongzi is clearly talking about persons. More importantly, though, Tu argues that a *rén* [humane] person abides by a moral principle to *abstain* from hatred. If this is right, though, we are left with an apparent paradox: if, by stipulation, a *rén* person is disinterested yet compassionate, abstaining from ill will or hatred, how is it that the *rén* person *alone* is capable of hatred? Tu's explanation is opaque (in part because it is not clear whether, in the final sentence, Tu is referring to the *rén* person or the hyperhonest villager); we're told that a man is often intolerant of evil because he lacks hatred himself, the implication being (perhaps) that having hatred oneself would make one tolerant of evil in others. There may be some argument to support this claim, but none can be found in this passage.

Finally, Chad Hansen (1993) also gives a deflationary reading of this passage, though along different lines. As with the interpretations just canvassed, he also downplays the emotional and aversive aspects of *wù*, but in an entirely different way. For Hansen reads this passage in light of the practice of "rectifying names" or "correcting names" (e.g., *Analects* 13.3). According to his reading, the terms *hào* and *wù* in *Analects* 4.3 do not refer to any psychological states of the *rén* person at all—let alone any emotional or reactive ones. Instead, Hansen argues that *Analects* 4.3 makes a claim about who it is that can properly rectify evaluatively laden terms such as *hào* and *wù* such that they are directed at proper referents in the world. Put another way, "*rén* enables one to class people as good and bad (*Analects* 4.3)" and thus correctly guide the actions of others (Hansen 1993: 69). In other words, Hansen might paraphrase *Analects* 4.3 as follows: "Only the *rén* person is capable of properly applying the terms 'loveable' and 'despicable' to individuals." Hansen's theory, if correct, would only be derivative of the passage's most basic, literal meaning. We might indeed classify individuals as loveable or despicable based upon a *rén* person's reactions and attitudes toward them. Nevertheless, the passage itself neither invokes the notion of rectifying names nor seems straightforwardly interpretable in light of that doctrine.

What's notable in all these interpretations is a reluctance to embrace the most straightforward, literal reading of the passage—that a *rén* person really (and properly) *despises* some people in a strongly aversive fashion. Why do these scholars (and many others) eschew such a reading? One reason might be that the more literal interpretation is itself not without some problems. For example, it seems in tension with other passages, such as *Analects* 12.22, where Kongzi states that *rén* individuals love others (without mention of despising). If we take these other passages seriously, then perhaps we should mitigate the contempt mentioned in *Analects* 4.3. This seems to be Huang's rationale: since the most fundamental meaning of *rén* is to love others, it is unlikely that the *wù* mentioned in *Analects* 4.3 is really something like contempt. However, even if Huang is right about the fundamental meaning of *rén* (I doubt there is such a fundamental meaning), this doesn't preclude the possibility that a *rén* person will experience contempt. (Indeed, as I
p. 210 shall argue later on, I believe there are independent reasons to think that a moral ↳ exemplar *ought* to experience appropriate contempt lest she be seen, in some deep and problematic sense, as morally defective.)

More importantly, other passages in the *Analects* suggest that taking firm approaches to moral transgressions—and the transgressors themselves—is morally apt. The idea that some version of love is the proper response to any and all persons or situations is not

supported in the text. Instead, different behaviors merit different responses, as articulated in the following passage:

> 或曰：「『以德報怨』，何如？」子曰：「何以報德？以直報怨，以德報德。」
>
> Someone asked, “The saying ‘requite malice with kindness’—what do you make of it?” The Mater replied, “How to requite kindness, then? Requite malice with uprightness, and kindness with kindness.” (14.34/40/15)

As Edward Slingerland puts it, “Each type of behavior has a response that is proper to it: injury should be met with sternness, whereas kindness is to be rewarded with kindness. Failure to discriminate in this way is an invitation to chaos” (Slingerland 2003a: 168).

More importantly, numerous passages indicate that it is part of the nobleman’s refined sensibilities to hold certain individuals in contempt, owing to their petty or odious behavior.

> 子貢曰：「君子亦有惡乎？」子曰：「有惡。惡稱人之惡者，惡居下流而訕上者，惡勇而無禮者，惡果敢而窒者。」曰：「賜也亦有惡乎？」「惡徼以為知者，惡不 係以為勇者，惡訐以為直者。」
>
> Zigong asked, “Does the nobleman have contempt (*wù* 惡) too?” The Master replied, “He has contempt: contempt for those who pronounce the bad points of others; contempt for those who remain below while criticizing those above; contempt for those who are bold yet lack propriety; contempt for those who are plucky yet violent.”
>
> The Master added, “Do you, Zigong, have contempt as well?” Zigong said, “[Yes.] Contempt for those who take plagiarism for wisdom; contempt for those who take insolence for courage; contempt for those who take slander for uprightness.” (17.24/50/19)

The more straightforward reading of *Analects* 4.3 gains further plausibility when considered in conjunction with a passage that appears shortly after it—4.6.

> 子曰：「我未見好仁者，惡不仁者。好仁者，無以尚之；惡不仁者，其為仁矣，不使不仁者加乎其身。」
>
> The Master said, “I have yet to see a person who loved *rén*, or one who despised (*wù* 惡) what was not *rén*. He who loved *rén* would esteem nothing above it. He who despised what is not *rén* would be *rén* himself; he would not allow anything that is not *rén* to be associated with his person.” (4.6/7/17)

There is some difficulty in parsing the phrase *qí wéi rén yǐ* 其為仁矣, translated above as “would be *rén* himself.” Nonetheless, despising what is not *rén* is here described as a key to being *rén* (or, minimally, to practicing *rén*). It can thus be understood as a
p. 211 disposition ↳ conducive to virtue. Here in 4.6, we also see some rationale for why contempt might be seen as a virtue: contempt can keep negative influences at bay. It seems well suited to this role.[5] Many passages recommend that one keep company with those who are morally laudable (e.g., *Analects* 1.6, 1.13, 17.8), and avoid those who are wicked (e.g., *Analects* 17.7).

The passages on contempt suggest that, on the plausible assumption that some persons truly are despicable (not exactly a leap of faith), failing to distinguish the despicable from the good would be a gross moral failure. Failing to sniff out a charlatan or scoundrel would mark a lack of wisdom or discernment; a virtuous individual who loved indiscriminately—without consideration of individual merit— would be a poor role model for others, potentially leading them to harm or victimization by despicable people. This is a pressing concern given that the early Confucians both recognized and endorsed the sway that properly cultivated individuals should have over others, especially over those who are younger, less experienced, or otherwise standing in need of guidance.

These do not exhaust the passages dealing with contempt in the *Analects*. Nonetheless, I want to draw the following tentative conclusion: the *Analects* recognizes that part of what it means to be a morally exemplary person is to feel and display genuinely negative, aversive feelings toward a range of appropriate targets. A properly cultivated individual will not only be *capable* of despising but will also routinely despise. The nobleman will not, having cultivated himself according to the curriculum laid out by Kongzi and his followers, rid himself of such feelings. Instead, they will remain part of his emotional repertoire, directed

spontaneously at relevant targets. I believe this is the correct view, even though it runs against the dominant orthodox interpretation and might not be attractive to some contemporary readers.

III. The Targets of Contempt

So, just what sorts of persons are targeted for contempt in the text? While the targets are variegated, one type invites the most scorn (and by a healthy margin). Kongzi and his students seemed to especially loathe the *glib*—that is, individuals who possessed eloquent charm and social sway yet lacked substance and real commitment. Why were they so concerned with glibness and eloquence? Were there no other targets worthy of contempt and resentment?

> 孔子曰：「益者三友，損者三友。友直，友諒，友多聞，益矣。友便辟，友善柔，友便佞，損矣。」
>
> Kongzi said, "Beneficial friendships number three, and harmful friendships also number three. The straight, honorable, and learned—these are the beneficial friends. Flatterers, skilled gratifiers, and glib slicksters—these are the harmful friends." (16.4/46/5)
>
> 子曰：「巧言令色，鮮矣仁！」
>
> The Master said, "Wily words and an ingratiating appearance—these are seldom indicative of the humane (*rén* 仁)."
p. 212 (1.3/1/9) ↳
>
> 子曰：「惡紫之奪朱也，惡鄭聲之亂雅樂也，惡利口之覆邦家者。」
>
> The Master said, "I despise (*wù* 惡) purple for displacing vermilion. I despise the tunes of Zheng for corrupting classical music. I despise clever talkers overturning states and noble families." (17.18/49/23)

These and similar passages (e.g., *Analects* 6.16, 11.25, 15.11) all target the same sort of individuals—those who use clever or wily words, put on airs, and otherwise ingratiate others. By ingratiating themselves to others and observing contemporary conventions of propriety, glib or unscrupulous persons could attain some measure of social and political success. However, motivated solely by good reputation, high office, or general social approval, they lack deeper commitments. They are artful but insincere, fluent but without compassion, driven but without noble purpose. They seek conventional success and power. This is the most common way of understanding these passages (see, e.g., Schwartz 1985; Slingerland 2003a, 2003b; Van Norden 2007). Schwartz, for example, believes that the repeated attacks on clever talk and glibness stem from their power to conceal; they afford individuals "that fatal capacity for disguising real feelings and embellishing ulterior motives by the abuse of words" (Schwartz 1985: 93). Among Kongzi's laments in the *Analects* are some that look back to earlier periods where scholars "learned for themselves," improving their conduct to reflect higher ethical ideals, whereas in his own time they "learn for others," seeking approval and acceptance. Lacking a true commitment to a noble *dào*—such as the *dào* of the ancient sage kings and the waning Zhou dynasty—the smooth-tongued elite would seek lower forms of gratification and success, chaining themselves to the material and instrumental.

These characteristics are surely part of the explanation for the text's scorn. Moreover, there might also be a measure of sour grapes motivating the contempt. Kongzi and his students were all ambitious individuals seeking positions of prominence and influence. They were in the business of reform and instruction. Naturally, one could imagine them resentful of others ascending to positions of prominence on the wings of superficial charm. Such individuals would be holding positions that should belong to those truly committed to restoring the world on its proper path—namely, those like Kongzi and his followers. I believe such a reading is not without its share of plausibility.

However, there is a lot more that we can say to explain why such individuals are singled out for contempt in the text. I don't believe this is simply a case of sour grapes, or of the Confucians disapproving of phony individuals. Rather, I believe these passages concerning contempt express a tacit and underlying fear of the risks attending those who follow Kongzi's *dào*—who try to live by his teachings and exemplify its ideals. Shakespeare once wrote that "In time we hate that which we often fear" (*Antony and*

Cleopatra; Armstrong 1999: 118), and I believe the source of Kongzi's greatest scorn in the text stems from a fear of how his own students might turn out.

Why? To begin, it's worth repeating that one of the main goals of Kongzi and his students was to wield political influence and enact policies reflecting the merits of the former Zhou culture that was rapidly eroding.[6] Without such power or influence, they had little
p. 213 hope of changing the trajectory of the world, of correcting its path. Given these ↳ goals, a nobleman's ability to hold sway over others—invariably, over others wielding real political power—would be a vital tool, causing others to yield to proper counsel and adopt beneficial policies without feeling resentful or manipulated.

How to wield such influence or sway? Kongzi was aware that subtle situational variables could impact the trajectory of one's interactions with others. The signals a *ru* would give off in his presentation would therefore be crucial to his overall success. The wrong first moves could be disastrous. Those pursuing the Confucian *dào* thus sought mastery over subtle details of conduct, minding their impact on their audience and adjusting accordingly. Indeed, it is abundantly clear in the *Analects* that Kongzi and his followers placed tremendous importance on minute matters of behavior such as one's posture, tone of voice, turns of phrase, and ceremonial garb. (In fact, the entirety of Book X of the *Analects* is devoted to detailed observations of Kongzi's overt behavioral mannerisms.)[7] The virtuous individual should be capable of triggering the right sequence of behaviors on any occasion by making the right "first moves," broadly construed. This would include appealing to the right sorts of reasons and having the best of intentions, of course, but it also—and crucially—involved being attentive to the particulars of the situations at hand, and modifying one's expressions, comportment, and demeanor accordingly.

> 君子所貴乎道者三：動容貌，斯遠暴慢矣；正顏色，斯近信矣；出辭氣，斯遠鄙倍矣。
>
> There are three things in our *dào* that a gentleman values most: by altering his demeanor he avoids violence and arrogance; by rectifying his countenance he welcomes trustworthiness; through his words and tone of voice he avoids vulgarity and impropriety. (8.4/18/18)
>
> 子張問行。子曰：「言忠信，行篤敬，雖蠻貊之邦行矣；言不忠信，行不篤敬，雖州里行乎哉？」
>
> Zichan asked about getting by in the world. The Master said, "In speech, be dutiful and trustworthy. In your conduct, be sincere and respectful. In this way, you will always get by in the world, even if you find yourself in some barbarian state. If your words aren't dutiful and trustworthy, if your conduct isn't sincere and respectful, how can you possibly get along in the world, even in your own region?" (15.6/42/11)
>
> 君子正其衣冠，尊其瞻視，儼然人望而畏之。
>
> The nobleman straightens his robe and cap, assumes a solemn gaze, and appears so dignified that others looking upon him cannot help but be awe-struck. (20.2/57/24)

Being authoritative or commanding required more than simply knowing the "correct" moral principles or policies, or having a sincere commitment to instantiate the *dào* of the ancient sage kings. In addition, being authoritative or commanding meant paying attention to minor details about one's presentation—one's appearance, one's style of speech, and one's conduct—the very ways one's person might be interpreted or perceived by others (Sarkissian 2023). The nobleman brings about changes in *others* by attending to aspects of *his own* comportment.

p. 214 One way to think of Kongzi's preoccupation with such minor details of personal decorum can be understood through the notion of *self-fulfilling prophecies*. In any social exchange, even before words are exchanged, individuals signal various attitudes and even content-rich information about themselves (often surreptitiously), which then serve to make certain types of behavioral reactions in others more likely, either through triggering certain emotional reactions or systems of beliefs (also called *schemas*). Once such emotions or schemas are activated, they guide the processing of new information, influencing how they perceive and interpret later signals and cues (especially ambiguous ones), such that further behavior is interpreted in ways so as that conform to the initial impressions.[8] If first impressions are favorable, then subsequent behavior will also be interpreted along positive lines; if unfavorable,

subsequent behavior will be interpreted along negative lines. The nobleman strives to control the triggers and prompts arising from his own person by carefully cultivating the details of his own bearing and decorum.

What were these minor details? How might one signal learning, cultivation, and moral authority? Much of Kongzi's curriculum was devoted to mastery of the minutia of ritual propriety and formal ceremony, memorization of classical poetry, music and literature, fluency in historical anecdotes, and a thoroughgoing devotion to the high culture of the waning Zhou dynasty. Mastery of these disciplines—representing the pinnacle of civilization—was paramount to attaining virtue. Indeed, lacking such mastery was considered tantamount to being useless (e.g., *Analects* 17.10).

The ultimate goal of this curriculum was to cultivate one's character into something noble—to come to personify the excellence of the tradition's historical exemplars. However, it is not difficult to see how doggedly pursuing these arts and honing these skills can, in some instances and with some individuals, make the devotee appear pedantic, narrow minded, or arcane. And here is where the danger lies for those seeking the poise, erudition, and learning of a nobleman. Pursuing these goals requires constant self-scrutiny, minding one's appearance and bearing, one's attire and style, one's tone of voice and choice of elocutions. This sort of practice can lead one to become more obsessed with social standing and the esteem of others instead of faithful application to the values and ideals of the pinnacle of Zhou high culture.

Kongzi of course emphasized that one err on the side of modesty, humility, and restraint. Yet it takes no great stretch of the imagination to see how the preoccupations outlined here can lead one astray. Advanced practitioners, carried away by their own learning, virtuosity, and command of high culture, can become arrogant, self-obsessed, and—that most despised of qualities in the text—*glib*.[9] Kongzi voices such worries at places in the text:

> 子曰：「事君盡禮，人以為諂也。」
>
> The Master said, "Those serving their lords with ritual propriety will be regarded as obsequious flatterers." (3.18/6/8)
>
> 子在陳曰：「歸與！歸與！吾黨之小子狂簡，斐然成章，不知所以裁之。」
>
> When the Master was in Chen, he said, "Oh, let's go home! Let's go home! Our young followers are wild and ambitious
> p. 215 —they put on a great show of brilliant cultural achievement, but they know not how to prune and shape it." (5.22/11/8)
> ↳
>
> 子謂子夏曰：「女為君子儒，無為小人儒。」
>
> The Master said to Zixia, "Be a nobleman *rú* 儒. Don't be a petty *rú*." (6.13/13/9)

In these passages we find Kongzi noting the danger attending those steeping themselves in the curriculum of the nobleman. Indeed, we even see Kongzi himself accused of being glib by an otherwise unknown Weisheng MOU:

> 微生畝謂孔子曰：「丘何為是栖栖者與？無乃為佞乎？」孔子曰：「非敢為佞也，疾固也。」
>
> Weishing MOU said to Kongzi, "Qiu[10]—what's with all this flitting about? Is it not merely to show off your glibness?" Kongzi replied, "I would not dare deem myself glib; I'm just stubborn." (14.32/40/11)[11]

If the very practices of self-cultivation advocated by the *Analects* could lend themselves toward glibness, arrogance, and putting on airs, then it should come as no surprise that these qualities are singled out among many others for denunciation in the text, and why particular contempt is directed at them. Kongzi really feared and despised this possibility. There is a thin line between being virtuous, learned, and conscientious on the one hand, and being preachy, pedantic, and priggish on the other. And nothing could jeopardize an upstart moral reformer's path quite so readily as being preachy, pedantic and priggish:

> 或曰：「雍也，仁而不佞。」子曰：「焉用佞？禦人以口給，屢憎於人。不知其仁，焉用佞？」
>
> Someone said, "Zhonggong is humane (*rén* 仁) but not eloquent (*nìng* 佞)." The Master said, "What need is there for 'eloquence'? Respond with a clever tongue and you will frequently be resented. I don't know of Zhonggong's

> humaneness, but what need is there for ‘eloquence’?” (5.5/9/14)

There are few things in social life more noxious than someone putting on airs, elevating himself above others, or engaging in overt attempts to court favor by shows of erudition or sophistication. Kongzi was, of course, against all this. His devotion to culture was motivated by its ability to cultivate and broaden one’s ethical imagination.

> 子曰：「興於詩，立於禮。成於樂。」
>
> Be inspired by the *Odes*; establish yourself with *Ritual*; perfect yourself with *Music*.[12] (8.8/18/30)
>
> 子曰：「小子！何莫學夫詩？詩，可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨。」
>
> The Master said, “Why is it none of you, my young friends, study the *Odes*? An apt quotation from the *Odes* may stimulate the imagination, endow one with breeding, enable one to live in communion with others and give expression to grievances.” (17.9/49/1–2)

Yes, perhaps this is all true. But it may be equally likely that such shows of eloquence will be interpreted by others as showing off. In
p. 216 *Analects* 17.13, Kongzi slanders the “village ↳ worthies” for wielding influence while lacking true virtue, and yet the village worthies *themselves* seem to have found Kongzi and his fellow *ru* to be pretentious and difficult, clinging to the ways of the past and preaching to others while refusing to conform to contemporary standards. This is expressed starkly in a discussion of *Analects* 17.13 in *Mengzi* 7B37.

> 曰：「『何以是嘵嘵也？言不顧行，行不顧言，則曰：古之人，古之人。行何為踽踽涼涼？生斯世也，為斯世也，善斯可矣。』閹然媚於世也者，是鄉原也。」
>
> Mengzi replied, “They are those who say, ‘Why are they [the *rú*] so pretentious? Their words are disconnected from their actions and their actions are disconnected from their words, and yet they say, “The ancients! The ancients!” Why do they act so peculiarly, and are so lordly and aloof? We are born into this age, so we should be of *this* age. Being good—that is all that is needed.’ Eunuch-like, ingratiating themselves to their generation—such are your village worthies.” (14.37/78/11)

It may be that the very practices of self-cultivation valued by the *ru* risked leading some of them astray and garnering the resentment of others. If this is correct, then we have a nice coherence between the passages discussing contempt in general on the one hand, and these more specific passages concerning the targets of contempt on the other.[13]

IV. The Role of Contempt in Self-Cultivation

Thus far, I’ve tried to argue for two claims: first, that a disposition to despise is a feature of morally exemplary persons in the *Analects*, and second, that paying attention to the targets of contempt in the text can shed light on some problems that might arise for those pursuing Kongzi’s *dào*.

Some may think that I have missed an important qualification: despising, as opposed to truly virtuous dispositions, has only instrumental value. A person seeking to cultivate herself should have the wisdom to enter environments in which her virtues might flourish as well as the wherewithal to avoid negative environments that might compromise her goals. Thus, despising the non-*rén* may be valuable insofar as it might help one to become *rén* (*Analects* 4.6) and advance along the moral path. However, this only speaks to how contempt may be favorable in pursuing certain ends. At the end of the process, though, contempt will fall aside, since its instrumental role in incubating virtue would have been fulfilled. The most obvious response to such an objection is that despising is *not* presented as part of the psychology of the learner, or of an immature person on the path to virtue. Rather, it is presented as a feature of the *nobleman*, of someone who can already be called *rén*. One cannot say that contempt falls aside at the end of self-cultivation because the text clearly states otherwise.

p. 217 One might respond by claiming that the nobleman shows contempt because he is aware of the weighty influence he has on others. Inside, the nobleman does not really harbor contempt toward anyone, let alone ill will. Instead (as suggested by some of the interpreters above) he feels disappointment or regret that certain individuals lack virtue or merit. However, the nobleman is a role model. Others will emulate him. So the nobleman needs clearly signal which individuals are worth emulating, and which are not. Only through outwardly showing contempt can he ensure that certain individuals are not heeded or mimicked. In sum, a nobleman might think it important to *signal* such attitudes as contempt and scorn to both (a) properly guide acolytes and (b) set correct parameters for moral evaluation. So, the nobleman may take up the *appearance* of contempt at appropriate times without, however, genuinely feeling it.

Such considerations may be adduced to save the orthodox interpretation championed by Y. Huang, Chan, and Tu. However, they fail to persuade. To see why, let us keep two issues separate. The first concerns what reasons we might adduce *third-personally* to explain why contempt may, over the course of a person's life, be helpful in bringing about certain desirable effects—why we might think feeling contempt toward appropriate targets is a good thing for the person herself and for those she may influence. The second is a completely separate issue about whether any such third-personal reasons or explanations are available to the person feeling contempt, or whether they could play a role in her psychological economy.

Consider, for example, Robert H. Frank's influential account concerning the rationality of certain emotions in his *Passions within Reason* (1988). Frank argues that certain emotions serve to foster long-term benefits for a person by counteracting desires—even rational desires—for immediate gratification. Imagine a case where someone has treated you unjustly—say, by refusing to pay you for your services in spite of having promised to do so. Imagine that the services amount to a day's work. What do you do? One option would be to fight for what is rightly yours—in other words, fight for the day's pay you were promised. However, there are costs to pursuing such a strategy. Were the person willing to pay he or she would presumably have done so, and there are greater harms that might arise if the situation escalates, including further personal injury or harm. Such considerations might make it seem rational to give up your just deserts and move on; resources expended in pursuing justice might outweigh any potential short-term benefits (namely, receiving the pay you are due). Nonetheless, as Frank points out, *signaling* to others that one is willing to pursue justice, retribution, or other forms of redress—even in spite of considerable personal risk, cost, or injury—can lead to very beneficial consequences; plausibly, such behavior can discourage mistreatment by others. However—and *crucially*—reactive attitudes such as anger or indignation can only work if they are felt sincerely and genuinely from a first-person perspective. They cannot be adopted at whim because of any cold calculations for long-term benefits.

Contempt, I suggest, might admit to similar rationale. We might explain despising the despicable as having instrumental benefits
p. 218 such as distancing a person from noxious influences and warning others to do the same. Similarly, we might ↳ say that it is important, over the long term, to despise the despicable lest one invite chaos or exploitation by others. This is, however, a *third-person* explanation, much like the one Frank proffers for reactive attitudes such as righteous anger. It arises from a taking a dispassionate, objective stance. It is unlikely and implausible that any person could, *first-personally*, adopt or maintain contempt toward any particular person or group in the absence of genuinely feeling it. Such displays, resulting from cold calculation and not sincere emotional reaction, would come across as phony and be unlikely to succeed. Indeed, reasoning to the conclusion that it would be instrumentally beneficial to oneself and to others to feel contempt would likely be self-undermining.

Frank himself maintains that we couldn't come to adopt the proper emotional attitudes at will solely for the benefits that they might provide. Such instrumental considerations would undermine an emotion's motivational power. Similarly, it seems difficult to imagine that, in the numerous passages surveyed in the *Analects*, the nobleman is putting on a mere display. Instead, the more natural reading (and the more genuine one, from a psychological perspective) is to read them as describing actual contempt, felt spontaneously and appropriately toward truly loathsome individuals.

V. Conclusion

There is no great difficulty, then, in thinking that Kongzi sincerely maintained that moral exemplars would despise certain individuals and hold them in contempt. Yet it is important to bear in mind that even while Kongzi recognized the necessity (inevitability?) of coming to such negative assessments and despising or blaming others, he maintained that one should only do so with appropriate caution and due consideration.

> 子曰：「眾惡之，必察焉；眾好之，必察焉。」
>
> The Master said, “It doesn’t matter if the multitude despises (*wù* 惡) someone; you must still examine the person yourself. It doesn’t matter if the multitude loves (*hào* 好) someone; you must still examine the person yourself.” (15.28/44/1)
>
> 子貢問曰：「『鄉人皆好之』，何如？」子曰：「未可也。」「『鄉人皆惡之』，何如？」子曰：「未可也。不如『鄉人之善者好之，其不善者惡之』。」
>
> Zigong asked, “ ‘All in the village love him.’ What do you think of that?” The Master said, “Not good enough.” “ ‘All in the village despise (*wù* 惡) him.’ What do you think of that?” The Master said, “Not good enough. Neither compares to ‘Those good in the village love him, those bad in the village despise (*wù* 惡) him.’ ” (13.25/36/13)

Indeed, unreflectively criticizing others is something criticized at various points in the text.

p. 219

> 攻其惡，無攻人之惡，非脩慝與？
>
> Attacking your own bad qualities, and not those of others—is this not the way to redress badness? (12.21/33/2)
>
> 子貢方人。子曰：「賜也賢乎哉？夫我則不暇。」
>
> Zigong was given to criticizing others. The Master said [sarcastically], “How worthy he is! As for myself, I hardly devote enough time to this.” (14.29/40/4)
>
> 子貢曰：「君子亦有惡乎？」子曰：「有惡：惡稱人之惡者 … 」
>
> Zigong asked, “Does the nobleman despise anyone?” The Master replied, “Yes. He despises those who pronounce the bad points of others … ” (17.24/50/19)

Voicing criticisms and negative evaluations of others is almost always frowned upon and associated with a lack of moral maturity. Besides reflecting a kind of moral hubris, focusing on others’ bad qualities shields one from the more important task of self-scrutiny. Blaming others is easy; admitting one’s own deficiencies is difficult. This finds poignant expression in WU Kangzhai’s commentary on *Analects* 14.29: “If I focus my attention on criticizing others, then my efforts with regard to examining myself will be lax. One cannot but be on guard against this fault!” (Slingerland 2003a: 166).

In sum, I think the *Analects* is right to maintain that not only is contempt warranted on certain occasions, but it must also figure into the psychological economy of any sufficiently mature moral agent. Self-cultivation does not—and should not—lead to it its destruction or mitigation. We would rightly view with suspicion anyone truly incapable of despising those who bring about suffering, who cause grief, who harm others or disregard their interests, or who threaten disorder for selfish motives. Such a dispassionate individual would lack something desirable from a moral perspective. Far from being a flaw in moral character, the capacity for contempt—properly directed—is integral to being fully human and morally mature.

Notes

1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Citations to the *Analects* and *Mencius* are to the respective starting points of those passages in the standard Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) concordance, as quoted in Sturgeon (2011).

2. Some might, additionally, take issue with "love" as a translation for *hào*. I think it works fine in these passages, as it is most naturally read as conveying care, benevolence, and admiration, as opposed to romantic affection or attraction.

3. My thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this issue.

4. Chang, Y. Huang, and Tu (discussed next) are not outliers in their readings but are instead following the orthodox reading based on the commentarial tradition. My thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting that I note this. For reasons I will outline, I believe the orthodox reading is false.

5. I will have more to say about this matter of motivation in the final section.

6. The translations of Brooks and Brooks (1998), Huang (1997), and, to a lesser extent, Slingerland (2003a) best convey these political aspects of the *Analects*.

p. 220 7. For an extended treatment of this idea, see Sarkissian (2010).

8. In the psychological literature, the importance of "first moves" or "first impressions" is sometimes linked with the *perseverance effect*, whereby an initial belief endures in an agent despite subsequent evidence to the contrary, and the *halo effect*, a cognitive bias in which one's assessment of an individual along one axis (say, their appearance or their occupation) influences and biases other, unrelated assessments (such as their character or their intelligence).

9. Indeed, this is how Kongzi is sometimes portrayed in the *Mozi* and in the *Zhuangzi*.

10. Note that "Qiu" was Kongzi's personal name, so Weisheng MOU was either Kongzi's elder by many years, or was being insulting.

11. I must admit that Kongzi's response has always seemed to me to be something of a non sequitur. The most plausible interpretation is that Kongzi is conveying his stubborn devotion to the high culture of the Zhou dynasty.

12. Most likely 詩, 禮, and 樂 (the characters translated provisionally as "the *Odes*," "*Ritual*," and "*Music*") refer to specific curricula or even particular books as opposed to mere general domains of life, hence the italics.

13. In a recent paper, appearing too late to incorporate into the present discussion, Curie Virág argues that among the other targets of contempt are some of Kongzi's own disciples, such as the exasperating ZAI Wo. Virag also includes the Xunzi in the scope of her discussion of contempt in early Confucianism. Her analysis repays reading. See Virág (2023).

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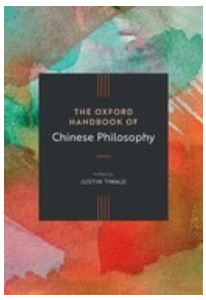

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CHAPTER

11 Kongzi as Therapeutic Philosopher

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Abstract

This chapter argues that Kongzi's concerns, teachings, and activities in the *Analects* suggest he is a particular *kind* of philosopher—a therapeutic philosopher—and clarifying this reveals why philosophers should study the *Analects* as philosophy. Understanding Kongzi in this way can deepen appreciation for and understanding of the *Analects* and therapeutic philosophy generally. The category of therapeutic philosophy highlights some features of Kongzi's view that are valuable for philosophers because they are distinctive when compared with views of Western therapeutic philosophers, including what it means to live a good life and how to do so. They prescribe forms of therapeutic practice that focus on cultivating many different aspects of the self, including human desires and emotions, and how to deal with some the most basic, yet most challenging, aspects of everyday life, from how to improve relationships with family and friends, to how to process and grapple with the deaths of loved ones. The kind of explicitness, comprehensiveness, and rigor associated with the work of philosophers characterizes Kongzi's teachings as presented in the *Analects* and interpreted in traditional commentaries, seen, for example, in his objection to following traditional practices without proper feelings and motives, and without adequate reflection on one's character, beliefs, and values. In exploring these dimensions, this chapter demonstrates that therapeutic philosophy is not just found in Hellenistic philosophical schools and in the work of particular modern Western philosophers but also in other parts of the world—including some of the most influential texts and thinkers in history.

Keywords: Kongzi, Confucius, Confucianism, therapeutic philosophy, Hellenistic philosophy, Nussbaum, Epicureans, Skeptics, Stoics, Nehamas

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I. Introduction

Contemporary philosophers have offered diverse interpretations of the *Analects*, but many of them share a hesitance to call Kongzi (Confucius) a philosopher.[1] As Bryan W. Van Norden notes, the question of whether figures like Kongzi were philosophers is a contentious issue because it depends on how one defines philosophy in general (Van Norden 2007: 1).[2] This issue is important for many philosophers because the claim that a given figure wasn't a philosopher is often presented as a reason for philosophers not to study that figure—at least not as a philosopher; in other words, it is used as a way to police the boundaries between philosophy and other disciplines. In this chapter, I argue that Kongzi's concerns, teachings, and activities in the *Analects* suggest that he is a good example of a particular *kind* of philosopher—a therapeutic philosopher—and that clarifying this matter can help us to appreciate some of the reasons why philosophers should study the *Analects* as philosophy.[3] My argument is not that the ancient Chinese understood Kongzi as a therapeutic philosopher or that it is the only helpful or accurate way of understanding him; rather, my argument is that understanding him in this way can deepen our appreciation for and understanding of both the *Analects* and therapeutic philosophy generally. I argue that the category of therapeutic philosophy highlights some of the features of Kongzi's view that are valuable for philosophers to study because they are distinctive when compared with the views of Western therapeutic philosophers and also capture accurate and important features of what it means to live a good life and how we might go about doing so. Indeed, therapeutic philosophy is not just found in Hellenistic philosophical schools and in the work of particular modern Western philosophers but in other parts of the world as well—including some of the most influential texts and thinkers in history.

II. The Nature of Therapeutic Philosophy

In *The Therapy of Desire*, Martha Nussbaum writes that "The Hellenistic philosophical schools in Greece and Rome—Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics—all conceived of philosophy as a way of addressing the most painful problems of human life. They saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering" (Nussbaum 1994: 3). They operated with a distinctive conception of philosophy and practiced philosophy, she writes, by focusing their attention on matters of daily significance as they arose in ordinary human lives, with a focus on what was needed to make life better.

> On the one hand, these philosophers were still very much philosophers—dedicated to careful argumentation, the explicitness, the comprehensiveness, and the rigor that have usually been sought by philosophy, in the tradition of ethical reflection that takes its start (in the West) with Socrates. (They oppose themselves, on this account, to the methods characteristic of popular religion and magic.) On the other hand, their intense focus on the state of desire and thought in the pupil made them seek a newly complex understanding of human psychology, and led them to adopt complex strategies—interactive, rhetorical, literary—designed to enable them to grapple effectively with what they had understood. In the process they forged new conceptions of what philosophical rigor and precision require. (1994: 4)

Nussbaum points out that in these ways, Hellenistic ethics are unlike "the more detached and academic moral philosophy that has sometimes been practiced in the Western tradition" (1994: 4).

In *The Art of Living* Alexander Nehamas develops a line of argument that intersects in some interesting and productive ways with Nussbaum's. He argues that philosophy has become a theoretical discipline in modern times, marked by a desire on the part of many philosophers "to find the answers to general and important questions, including questions about ethics and the nature of the good life, without believing that their answers have much to do with the kind of person they themselves turn out to be" (Nehamas 1998: 2). In contrast, Nehamas argues, in antiquity Greek and Roman philosophers were primarily concerned with the practical dimensions of how a worthwhile life is lived:

> In the case of pure theory, the only issue that matters is whether the answers to one's questions are or are not correct. In the case of theory that affects life, the truth of one's views is still an issue, but what also matters is the kind of person, the sort of self, one manages to construct as a result of accepting them. (2)

p. 224 Without urging a "return" to the latter conception of philosophy, Nehamas argues that we should recognize that such a conception exists and study how it survives in the work of philosophers such as Nietzsche and Foucault, thereby "opening a space for a way of doing philosophy that constitutes an alternative, though not necessarily a competitor, to the manner in which philosophy is generally practiced in our time." (2)

Anyone who has spent time studying early Confucian texts will recognize that there are important parallels between the aspects of Greek and Roman philosophy that Nussbaum and Nehamas highlight and early Confucian thought. As T. C. Kline has argued, "Surveying both extant and unearthed Chinese texts from the early period, we find that the vast majority, though not all, deal with questions of moral and religious cultivation and transformation" (Kline 2006: 235). Kline further argues that Nussbaum's particular focus on a therapy of desire in Hellenistic discussions of reason and the passions can helpfully inform our study of early Confucian philosophers, who also evince a strong concern with desire and its proper cultivation. Using the work of Xunzi as an example, Kline argues that although early Confucians do not advocate a need to eliminate our desires, they share with Hellenistic philosophers a belief

> that desires play an important role in determining whether a life is flourishing, and they prescribe forms of therapeutic practice to address human desires and emotions. In general, the flourishing Confucian life requires that our original desires be reshaped or cultivated. Left to follow the desires of our original nature, we usually fail to fulfill the Confucian vision of the humane life. (Kline 2006: 236)[4]

As Kline notes, Xunzi is not the only early Confucian philosopher to prescribe forms of therapeutic practice to address human desires and emotions. My aim in this paper is to show that the thought of Kongzi is a rich therapeutic resource, as well. The therapeutic practices we find in the *Analects* focus on cultivating many different aspects of the self, and as a result, focusing on the therapeutic dimension of Kongzi's thought can help us to note important features of what it means to be a self-cultivationist, and what it means to be a therapeutic philosopher.[5]

Nussbaum notes that Hellenistic philosophers are distinctive in part because they focused their attention on matters of daily significance as they arose in ordinary human lives—something that also characterizes Kongzi's concerns in the *Analects*. Throughout the text, Kongzi addresses some the most basic and yet most challenging aspects of everyday life, from how we can improve our relationships with our parents, siblings, spouses, and children, to how we process and grapple with the deaths of those we care about. Yet as we have seen, Nussbaum also notes that Hellenistic philosophers are still "very much philosophers—dedicated to careful argumentation, the explicitness, the comprehensiveness, and the rigor that have usually been sought by philosophy" (Nussbaum 1994: 4). Although a lack of "careful argumentation" in the *Analects* partly accounts for the hesitance of some to call Kongzi a philosopher, I will argue that explicitness, comprehensiveness, and rigor certainly do characterize Kongzi's teachings as
p. 225 they are presented in the text and interpreted in traditional commentaries.[6] Additionally, ↳ Kongzi opposes himself, as Hellenistic philosophers did, to certain popular religious beliefs and practices in his time—including, as I will argue, the tendency to follow traditional practices without the proper feelings and motives. Throughout the text, Kongzi is concerned not just with actions but with the feelings, intentions, and desires of those around him, and he advocates not just specific practices but also specific ways of engaging in those practices in order to cultivate oneself and live a richer, more fulfilling, and happier life. Kongzi is interested not just in the truth of his views but with what Nehamas calls "the kind of person, the sort of self, one manages to construct as a result of accepting them"—and with the nitty-gritty details of what the process of self-cultivation entails. All of these things make Kongzi an excellent candidate for the kind of philosopher and corresponding conception of philosophy that Nussbaum and Nehamas describe, which I will call "therapeutic philosophy." Therapeutic philosophers address practical, everyday problems with a focus on the practical dimensions of how to lead a good life, including the specific practices that help one to become a certain kind of person. Additionally, they offer explicit, comprehensive, and rigorous accounts of these things, often giving reasons and arguments for their views, which helps to show why it is appropriate to call them philosophers.

III. Therapeutic Philosophy in the *Analects*: Harmony and the Rites

The *Analects* is a rich resource for those who are interested in the details of what makes life fulfilling and how we become good people, including how we overcome the daily challenges of life at home, at work, and with friends. The text offers a particular account of a good life (following the Way) and the person who lives it (the *junzi:* "exemplary person" or "cultivated person"), but it also describes how one becomes that kind of person, and the struggles one encounters along the Way.[7] Kongzi draws upon and works to recover what he understands as ancient values and practices that his society has begun to lose, which he believes accounts for the general decline of his culture and society. He maintains that one of the fundamental mistakes of his society and culture is to dismiss or minimize practical aspects of daily life as unimportant, when in fact these apparently minor things we do are important and even necessary features of a good life.

For Kongzi, one of the central features of a good life is harmony (*he* 和) in one's relationships with family and friends, and in the wider circles of which one is a part. Although the achievement of harmony requires many things, one of the things that Kongzi highlights is our attentiveness to others and the way in which this provides a very tangible way to work toward harmony: "When the Master was singing along with other people and it was good, he always had them repeat it, and only after that would he harmonize with it" (7.32).[8] This passage provides a helpful illustration of the ideal of harmony by appealing to music. Different notes are
p. 226 required in order to achieve ↳ harmony, which shows that according to this ideal, uniformity is not the goal; rather, the right kinds of differences—such as complementary character traits, talents, or tendencies—can make life richer and more enjoyable, just as certain notes when played together create a fuller, more beautiful sound. In addition to the beauty that comes from multiplicity and difference—such as complementary voices singing in harmony, as opposed to just one voice or multiple voices singing in unison—there is also a special kind of joy that one experiences when one joins cooperatively with others in this way. Harmonious relationships in which we work together with others in a complementary, mutually supporting way not only makes our lives better in a variety of ways; these kinds of relationships also make us happy. But the beauty and joy of harmony is not achieved simply by "jumping in"; one must listen and watch carefully those with whom one desires to harmonize. What Kongzi does in 7.32 has an analog in the daughter who attends to the tone of her mother's voice (and not just the things she says) during a conversation, or a spouse who is about to initiate a conversation about a stressful topic but postpones it when they see that their spouse looks exhausted. As we shall see, for Kongzi, the ability and the desire to attend to the needs of others in this way are a reflection of our character, but regularly taking the time and effort to be attentive to others also shapes our character by further developing our capacity for sympathetic understanding and providing opportunities to cultivate virtues like filial piety, compassion, and humility. Although it is easily overlooked or forgotten, consistently taking stock of what and how others are doing—and doing so carefully and attentively by watching and listening deeply to such things as tone of voice and subtle facial expression—has both short- and long-term consequences for the most important relationships in our lives. This is why it is so essential to the achievement of harmony in any relationship and a central part of what it means to live a good life, for Kongzi.

One of the most obvious ways in which the *Analects* presents a therapeutic view is through its discussion of the rites (*lǐ* 禮), a set of traditional moral and religious practices including what we would call rituals, social customs, rules of etiquette, and sacrificial offerings. Together, these things constitute a unified code of conduct, and the rites specify much of the content of Zhou culture, in terms of the patterns of behavior that govern interactions between members of families, communities, and society as a whole. While acting in accordance with the rites does not guarantee a harmonious outcome, the rites are a necessary feature of a harmonious society:

> When it comes to the practice of ritual (*li* 禮), it is harmony (*hé* 和) that should be valued. It is such harmony that makes the Way of the former kings so beautiful, and in all matters, great and small, we should follow them. Yet if you know enough to value harmony but try to attain it without being regulated by the rites, this will not work. (1.12)

The rites include many aspects of daily life that members of Kongzi's society were beginning to abandon as they questioned their
p. 227 importance, but Kongzi contends that things we might be inclined to minimize as matters of politeness—such as asking questions ↳ about someone's hometown when you visit them, instead of holding forth about how much you already know about the place—are in fact not only expressions of our character but also critical opportunities to develop our character and the character of others. An example is seen in 3.15, which states that when Kongzi went into the Great Ancestral Temple,

> he would ask about everything that took place there. Someone asked, "Who says this son of a person from Zou understands ritual? He goes into the Great Ancestral Temple and has to ask about everything!" When the Master heard about this remark, he said, "The asking *is* a ritual."

One of the reasons why Kongzi views asking questions in this context as a ritual is its therapeutic value: asking questions forces the visitor to think of others and provides an opportunity to develop humility, especially when he unexpectedly learns something new. It simultaneously allows the host to be reminded of and to take joy in the practices and stories associated with his ancestral home. As an expression of interest and shared values, this exchange and the conversations that may follow provide an opportunity to strengthen and deepen their relationship.

A powerful example of Kongzi as a therapeutic philosopher is *Analects* 17.21, in which one of Kongzi's students, ZAI Wo, asks about the traditional three-year mourning period that sons were to observe upon the death of a parent—which had come to be viewed as impractical by many in Kongzi's time—saying,

> [O]ne year is long enough. If *junzi* go for three years without practicing the rites, then the rites will fall into ruin. If they go three years without making music, the music will surely be lost. The old grain has been used up; the new grain has ripened; drills have kindled new fires that replace the old ones—one year is long enough![9]

ZAI Wo not only critiques the traditional practice in this passage; he offers reasons why we ought to change it, including that it will help to preserve important aspects of traditional culture (the rites and music) as well as practical concerns (supplies of grain and tinder). Kongzi replies, "Eating your fine rice, wearing your brocade gown—would you feel at peace doing that?," and ZAI Wo says he would. Then Kongzi replies,

> If you would feel at peace, then by all means, do it. When *junzi* are in a state of mourning, if they ate fine food they would not taste its sweetness. If they listened to music they would feel no joy. If they were in a comfortable dwelling, they are not at peace. But now, if you are at peace, then do it.

After ZAI Wo leaves, Kongzi remarks,

> This shows how lacking in *Rén* 仁 [Goodness, humaneness] this ZAI Wo is! Children are completely dependent upon the
p. 228 care of their parents for the first three years of ↳ life—this is why the three-year mourning period is the common practice throughout the world. Did ZAI Wo not receive three years of care from his parents?[10]

Kongzi's response to ZAI Wo includes, first, a reference to how the *junzi* feels when he is in mourning: he does not enjoy the things he would ordinarily enjoy, such as eating sweet foods or listening to music. This is why he gives up these things, Kongzi says, essentially maintaining that the *junzi* follows the mourning rituals because he feels right and best in following them: the rituals meet his emotional needs, specifying behavior that he is already inclined toward and that allows him to express his feelings but that would not ordinarily be acceptable. This passage shows how the traditional rituals that Kongzi advocates are designed to have a therapeutic effect on those who practice them. When one is grieving, one finds oneself unable to enjoy the usual things, and the rites in this case formalize the practice of abstaining from these things, so that doing so becomes a communally acknowledged practice whereby one acknowledges, lives out, and processes one's deep feelings of loss and sadness. Others observe, support, and in some cases enable one's participation in these rituals.

Kongzi offers a further explanation of why such an extended mourning period is appropriate, stating that the three-year mourning period is the received practice because children are completely dependent upon their parents for the first three years of life. In emphasizing this he emphasizes the highly unique nature of the bond between parents and children, which translates into the highly unique, and particularly devastating, nature of the loss of a parent or child. Through the mourning ritual, space is carved out for those who are grieving the loss of a parent to express and work through their emotional pain. Instead of "pressing on" or "putting on a brave face" and behaving as though nothing happened, one takes an extended period of time to feel and process the loss of one's parent and to reflect on what it will mean to carry on without them in this life. In emphasizing that the reason that the *junzi* observes the mourning period is the deep grief he feels, which alters his ability to take joy in ordinary things, Kongzi presents the therapeutic

value of the ritual as the reason why a cultivated person follows it. It is important to acknowledge the therapeutic value of such practices; a culture that carves out the space and time for people to grieve openly and actively is one in which people will tend to be healthier emotionally.[11] People are more likely to be better able to carry on in the future, to take joy again in the things they love, and to find meaningful ways of keeping the memory of loved ones alive in their physical absence. Losing one's parents is an inevitable part of life for most of us, and in this passage Kongzi defends a ritual that enables one to carry on as a whole person, and not just as a shadow of one's former self or as someone who is forever diminished by this loss.

In examining Kongzi's remarks on why the *junzi* observes the three-year mourning period, it is also helpful to note what Kongzi does *not* say: he does not say that the *junzi* observes the three-year mourning period because it is tradition, because ritual texts say he should, or because it will prevent misfortune. Instead, he makes an implicit argument: if one is a *junzi*, then one will experience
p. 229 certain feelings and emotions in these circumstances, and since ZAI Wo does not experience those feelings and emotions, ↳ he is not a *junzi* (and his view is not that of a *junzi*, either). Kongzi offers reasons for practicing an extended mourning period that even contemporary readers can appreciate, including the fact that practices such as abstaining from things one ordinarily enjoys accurately reflect, and allow one to express, one's actual feelings, as well as the fact that the loss of one's parents is particularly difficult because of the uniqueness of the relationship. Most of us have the longest and most complex relational history with our parents and elder siblings; in most cases no one else plays such a pivotal role in shaping our character or provides such fundamental care. They are also our connection to the past: when our parents die, their memories of and experiences with our grandparents, great-grandparents, and others can live on only through us. These are not only compelling reasons for mourning the deaths of parents differently than we mourn the deaths of others; they are also explanations of why the loss of our parents is more painful than most other losses.

This passage clearly highlights, first, Kongzi's concern with everyday problems. Most of us will one day be faced with the task of how to process and grieve the loss of our parents. Kongzi urges us to think about our emotional needs and to follow practices that allow for the full expression of our grief. In so doing he highlights the therapeutic value of the three-year mourning period. Additionally, Kongzi gives clear and detailed reasons both for why we should observe the rituals that are a part of the three-year mourning period and why three years is an appropriate length of time. These things help to show how Kongzi operates as a therapeutic philosopher in this passage. A final noteworthy aspect of 17.21 is Kongzi's insistence that ZAI Wo should not observe the three-year mourning period if he does not have the same feelings as the *junzi*. Again, it is instructive to note what Kongzi does not say here: he does not tell ZAI Wo that he should observe the mourning period anyway and that perhaps over time he will come to appreciate its value, nor does he encourage conformity with tradition or offer something akin to "This is how we do it; it's who we are, and that's why you should do it, too." Rather, Kongzi maintains that if we do not have at least the beginnings of the right sorts of feelings when participating in a ritual or performing an ethical action, then we should not bother with it at all. He also points out that ZAI Wo has *failed to develop* these feelings despite having opportunities to do so. This helps to explain why he does not expect that practicing this ritual will cultivate ZAI Wo's feelings; he does not have even the beginnings of the appropriate feelings, whereas someone at ZAI Wo's stage of development should actually have much more. We can see, then, that Kongzi does not accept the view that the rites can serve to cultivate anyone's character, at any stage of their development. For Kongzi, one first needs to work at cultivating the appropriate feelings and emotions, and only then will one want to practice the ritual; ZAI Wo has failed in both respects, and so the rites will not be effective in further shaping his character. In saying the *junzi* observes traditional mourning practices *because of how he feels*, Kongzi suggests that our feelings should motivate us to follow the rites. The rites, in turn, provide a kind of therapy for us—an outlet for our grief that accords with and allows us to fully express the complex range of emotions that we experience in life.

p. 230 A concern with ritual is one of the most distinctive aspects of Kongzi's view as a therapeutic philosopher, compared with, for instance, the views of Hellenistic Greek and Roman philosophers. He shares with these philosophers a concern with the practical matters of daily life, but these things are often a part of or interconnected with the rites. Ivanhoe points out that the rites "shaped the character of those who practiced them, expressed and further refined the virtue of those who knew them well, and influenced those who participated in or observed a given ceremony" (Ivanhoe 2000: 4).[12] Similarly, in a modern context, social customs such as spoken greetings and a handshake or hug both express and develop friendliness, and not only serve as expressions of the relationship that exists between two people but also reaffirm and further develop that relationship. When children learn to greet people they know in these ways, they not only learn appropriate ways to express their affection for someone; they further develop that affection. And

the child's expression of greeting in turn generates affection in others. This is why Kongzi maintains that it is not only those who participate in or follow the rites who are affected by them; those who watch or observe them are also affected. Indeed, a central feature of Kongzi's view of ritual is a strong focus on how ritual participants affect one another: rituals shape our character through mutual participation and observation of others, and they simultaneously deepen the relationships between us.

Rituals also maintain and restore our emotional health. They bind us to others in unique and enduring ways, reminding us that we are not alone and that others share our pain and our joys. In addition, as we have seen, rituals help us to emotionally process experiences of all kinds, which enables us to function better and to live happier, more satisfying lives. In *Analects* 8.2, Kongzi emphasizes the way in which rituals shape us, tutoring our different impulses and tendencies so that they help us to achieve the right balance in life: "Politeness without ritual becomes labored. Cautiousness without ritual becomes timidity. Courage without ritual becomes unruliness. Uprightness without ritual becomes aggression" (8.2). Kongzi's remarks in this passage are characteristic of a therapeutic philosopher, particularly his concern with the everyday challenges we face (Was I too timid in that meeting? Was I too inflexible in my response to that student's request?), the specific practices that can help us, and the ways in which they can do so. He offers a detailed account of how and why ritual can make a difference in our daily lives, in this case specifying how rituals help us to avoid different kinds of excesses and deficiencies in our interactions with others.

Throughout the *Analects*, Kongzi expresses the view that rituals cannot serve their proper function with respect to our character if particular conditions are not met. First, we must understand the meaning and importance of a ritual. Second, we must have the proper feelings when we participate in a ritual. A philosophical view is presented here, even if clear and rigorous arguments are not always offered in support of it.[13] Kongzi's views on understanding the meaning and importance of rituals are seen clearly in his discussion of when changes to rituals are permissible in *Analects* 9.3:

> A hemp ceremonial cap is prescribed by the rites, but these days people use silk. This is frugal, and I go along with others. Bowing at the foot of the stairs is prescribed by ↳ the rites, but these days people bow at the top of the stairs. This is presumptuous, and although it goes against what others do, I bow at the foot of the stairs.[14]

As traditional commentaries on this passage explain, replacing the more expensive cap of hemp for a silk cap is an acceptable amendment to the ritual because it is frugal and therefore allows those who might not be able to afford the more expensive cap to continue to practice the ritual (or at least to do so without financial hardship), which helps to keep the ritual alive. This change does not alter the meaning and purpose of the ritual, since the head covering has symbolic importance, not the material. This is what makes bowing after ascending the stairs, instead of before, an unacceptable change for Kongzi: bowing is a way of asking permission to enter and approach a ruler or superior, and as a result, to bow after one has already entered and ascended the stairs defeats the purpose of the ritual. His remarks emphasize the importance of knowing the reason why we perform certain rituals in certain ways, including the symbolic significance of different ritual objects as well as ritual actions.

In 9.3, Kongzi indicates that we must know why we perform rituals in certain ways in order to know what changes or amendments to rituals might be acceptable, but the therapeutic value of rituals is also enhanced when we understand their meaning and purpose. Rituals are unlikely to shape our character if we do not understand what we are doing and why. They are also unlikely to shape us if we do not have the proper feelings. In 3.4, when asked about the roots of ritual, Kongzi replies, "What a great question! When it comes to ritual, it is better to be spare than to make an extravagant display. When it comes to mourning rituals in particular, it's better to grieve deeply than to be fastidious about the details." It is more important, in Kongzi's view, to feel the appropriate emotions during a ritual than to focus on getting all of the formal details of the ritual right or to focus on the performance one is putting on for others. He addresses this again in 3.26: "performing rituals without reverence, observing mourning rites without sorrow—how can I bear to look at such a person?" For Kongzi, the entire purpose of ritual is defeated when people simply "go through the motions" without having and being motivated by the proper feelings.

IV. Therapeutic Philosophy in the *Analects*: Filial Piety and Ancestral Sacrifices

Kongzi expresses a similar view concerning expressions of filial piety, showing that his concern with our emotions, feelings, and desires is a broader ethical concern, relating not just to ritual but to the cultivation of a variety of virtues. One of the most important of these virtues is filial piety, which makes a great deal of sense given that our relationship with our parents spans the entire course
p. 232 of our lives, changing and evolving ↳ in complex ways over time, and influencing us long after their deaths. The *Analects* presents the view that filial piety is the root of the other virtues (1.2), serving as the foundation for our moral development, and indeed, in most cases our parents provide the most formative experiences we have in life, both explicitly instructing and conveying to us by their example not just how to live but an entire attitude toward life.[15] Parent–child relationships that are loving, supportive, and respectful help children to develop the willingness and the desire to interact with others in a respectful and caring manner. Not only can we easily see the therapeutic dimension of Kongzi's thought in his remarks about filial piety; we also see him offering a clear and rigorous account of this virtue, which again highlights for us why he is a good example of a therapeutic philosopher. In 2.7, Kongzi says that these days, filial piety "just means providing your parents with food. But we provide dogs and horses with food. If you do not feel reverence, what is the difference?" In 2.8, he says "[Paying attention to] facial expressions is difficult. When there is work to be done, young people take it on, and when wine and food are served, older people go first. But isn't filial piety more than this?" In these passages Kongzi makes clear that we ought to have genuine respect or reverence (*jìng* 敬) for someone when we fulfill our filial duties to them, and he also maintains that these feelings are expressed in our demeanor, including such things as the expression on our face. When the right actions are performed with a grudging expression, this does little to strengthen or create a bond between people, and it also does little to improve our character.

In 4.21 Kongzi again emphasizes the close connection between our attentiveness to easily forgotten details and our feelings about our parents, saying, "Always be mindful of your parents' ages. On the one hand, it is a reason to rejoice. On the other, it is a reason for trepidation." Maintaining an awareness of one's parents' ages promotes gratefulness for their wisdom and continued presence in our lives, as well as an awareness that they will not live forever. Social customs such as birthday celebrations, like the observances that were a part of the rites in Kongzi's time, can serve as occasions that remind us to engage in this type of reflection. The mixture of joy and anxiety that this produces in us ought to translate into such things as devoting more time to maintaining a close relationship with our parents, seeking their advice, helping them with challenges they are facing, and enjoying their company as much as possible. These things are good for children and parents, as well as those who observe these interactions, but they are only good for us if there is a mutual willingness to create and sustain such a relationship. Just as children must be dedicated to reaching out to their parents, parents must be receptive to the assistance, care, and attention that their children offer, and they, too, must do their part to nurture the relationship as long as they are able. Such relationships contribute to our well-being and shape our character in fundamental ways.

Kongzi's remarks in 4.18 also emphasize the connection between our feelings about our parents and our actions:

> In serving your parents, you should gently remonstrate with them [if you disagree with them]. But if you see that they do not intend to follow your advice, then once again be respectful and do not oppose them, and even if you are distressed, do not be resentful.

p. 233 Interestingly, Kongzi specifies in this passage that automatic compliance with our parents' wishes is *not* what is required of us, if we are truly filial. If we genuinely respect our parents, we will express our concerns and reservations to them. Indeed, in virtually any healthy relationship, if one really respects and cares about someone, one will normally express one's concerns. If, on the other hand, one doesn't really respect a person and doesn't care about them very deeply, one might simply throw up one's hands or refrain from commenting and let the person proceed as she wishes.[16] Here, it is important to note that Kongzi's view is not just that we ought to be open and honest with those we care about and respect—our parents being the most important examples of such individuals—but also that the way in which we put things to them (both in our choice of words and such things as our facial expression and tone of voice) should reflect our feelings of respect, concern, and affection for them. Doing this not only helps to prevent those we care about from making mistakes; it serves as an opportunity to remind them how much we care. As a result, remonstrance is a key part of creating and sustaining strong relationships between parents and children, which is something that enriches our lives

immeasurably, in Kongzi's view. Additionally, when we dig a little deeper and work to present our concerns to our parents openly, respectfully, and in a loving way, it impacts our character. It makes us better people when we take the time to reflect on our feelings for our parents and translate them into caring behavior. Our desires are of utmost concern to Kongzi in this passage: genuine respect gives rise to the desire to express one's concern in a respectful and caring manner. But the right kind of remonstrance, including the style in which it is presented, is not just an expression of our character; it also serves to further develop our character and the character of others. Here again, we see clearly the therapeutic focus of Kongzi's remarks.

One of the intriguing aspects of Kongzi's view of filial piety in the *Analects* is his emphasis on how ancestral sacrifices can shape our character.[17] In multiple passages, both through his remarks and his actions, Kongzi emphasizes the importance of fully participating in these rituals: " 'Sacrifice as if they were present' means to sacrifice as if the spirits are present. The Master said, 'If I am not fully present at the ritual sacrifice, it's as though I haven't participated in the ritual at all' " (3.12). The first line of this passage, which appears to quote a fragment of another text ("sacrifice as if they were present"), expresses some anxiety about whether the spirits are present and thus whether the sacrifice will be effective. As Michael Puett has shown, in Kongzi's time this worry increasingly led people to hire ritual specialists to perform the sacrifices for them, out of a desire to ensure that the sacrifices would mollify the spirits and get them to work on descendants' behalf and not against them. Traditional commentators disagree over what Kongzi means by "taking part in the ritual." Some read this line literally, as being present at sacrificial practices instead of sending a proxy; other commentators interpret "taking part" as being fully present in the psychological sense—not just going through the motions or seeking material blessings but being attentive to one's actions and having appropriate feelings and motivations. Either way, Kongzi's response shows both that he disapproves of the practice of not fully taking part in one's ancestral sacrifices *and* that he disagrees about the ultimate goal of the sacrifices. Puett argues that for Kongzi

> the point of sacrifice is not to persuade the spirits but to transform the human performing the ritual. Accordingly, one must perform the act oneself, and one must do so even though the spirits may not be present during the ritual. This position does not deny that spirits act in the world. Rather, it argues against the view that humans should attempt to control the spirits with sacrifices: the goal should be self-transformation. (Puett 2002: 98)

On Kongzi's view, ancestral sacrifices can lead us to view ourselves and our lives differently, and his emphasis on the subsequent transformative effect they can have on us shows how his interests align with those of other therapeutic philosophers. But this dimension of Kongzi's thought is not only seen in his remarks; it is also seen in the descriptions of his behavior in the *Analects*, which tells us that Kongzi observed the purification rituals that preceded ancestral sacrifices (10.7) and offered sacrifices to his ancestors at each meal: "Even if it was no more than coarse grain, a soup of vegetables, or melon, before every meal he set aside a portion as a sacrificial offering, and always did so with reverence" (10.11). In addition to establishing that Kongzi viewed these practices as important, these passages highlight some important aspects of ancestral sacrifice. First, Kongzi's offerings are always accompanied by genuine feelings of reverence. Like our participation in funeral rituals and our fulfillment of filial duties, our feelings and attitudes are critically important in ancestral sacrifices. Second, Kongzi follows the purification rituals that precede ancestral sacrifices, which were up to 10 days in length and involved not only external changes such as clothing and diet but thinking about the deceased, what they looked like, the sound of their voice, and the things they enjoyed. Deborah Sommer observes, "Descendants performing ancestral sacrifices approached the preparation of sacrificial offerings with emotional hypervigilance and performed them with the expectations of heightened sentiments of filial piety, reverence, devotion, joy, equanimity, and attentiveness" (Sommer 2003: 210).

Understanding these details helps to show why Kongzi believed that ancestral sacrifices were important. In telling us that Kongzi observed the purification rituals preceding ancestral sacrifice, the *Analects* tells us that Kongzi spent considerable time remembering and meditating on who his ancestors were—their character, the challenges they faced, and the kinds of examples their lives offer. This type of reflection has a number of critically important potential effects on us. First, it provides us with a larger perspective on our own lives and problems—in some cases reminding us of how small they are relative to the challenges others have faced, but in other cases showing us that others have faced precisely the same kinds of challenges. This is something that historical perspective in general can provide, but personal stories—especially about those who are related to us—have a particularly powerful impact on us. Second, knowing and remembering the lives and character of one's ancestors has a way of reminding us of our debt to others—the sacrifices and decisions that previous generations made that led not just to our existence but also to the opportunities we have today.

It also has a way of reminding us of our responsibilities to others—and that many of our decisions will influence not only the lives of
p. 235 our children but our grandchildren and subsequent ↳ generations as well. In some cases, the influence will be minor, but in others, it will be quite dramatic. For Kongzi, one's influence on future generations is not simply a matter of advances in education, career opportunities, or material wealth. In a culture where one learns the stories of one's ancestors' lives, one's influence on subsequent generations is also a matter of character. Perhaps one of the most brilliant insights of the Confucian tradition is that the stories of our ancestors have a unique potential to influence and inspire us. While stories about others can do this, as well, because of our connection to members of our own families—the fact that they are "ours," and that we carry within us a part of them—they tend to serve as a greater resource for change and often have a greater therapeutic effect on us as a result. The therapeutic effects here include not just inspiring us to rise to the challenges we face but also helping us to find contentment and happiness where we are—something that we often gain only by having a larger perspective on ourselves and our lives. During college, my grandmother's photograph on my dorm room desk reminded me to work as hard as I possibly could to get the most out of every course I took, because she gave up her college scholarship in order to care for her dying mother—and never had the opportunity to go back. Today, as a parent of young children living in an often cluttered, disorganized apartment, my grandmother's photograph reminds me to prioritize and savor the time with my children, because her cluttered closets did not make her any less of a mother and grandmother. (To the contrary, they showed that she prioritized spending time with loved ones over keeping a perfect house.) What is required in order to fully and regularly experience these therapeutic effects, however, is not simply learning and knowing the stories of one's ancestors' lives; rather, one must meditate on these stories routinely, engaging them in intensive forms of reflection. When one understands the remarkable potential that these practices have for transforming our lives, then it becomes much easier to make sense of passages like 3.11: "Someone asked for an explanation of the Di sacrifice (the great ancestral sacrifice). The Master said, 'I don't know. Anyone who knew how to explain it could hold the world right here.' And he pointed to the palm of his hand."

V. Conclusion

Examining the ways in which Kongzi serves as an example of a therapeutic philosopher can help us to deepen our understanding of and appreciation for Kongzi's thought in a number of ways. It helps us to see and appreciate that the *Analects* is not simply a fragmented series of remarks; it offers a consistent and quite comprehensive picture of what a good life looks like, what the person who lives it is like, and how one might become that sort of person. In many places, as we have seen, Kongzi offers reasons why we ought to engage in certain practices and work to cultivate ourselves in particular ways. Understanding Kongzi as a therapeutic
p. 236 philosopher helps to highlight the overarching aims behind his advocacy of certain practices, virtues, and moral sensibilities. ↳ These insights are important both for those who study and work on the *Analects*, and for philosophers who wonder why the *Analects* might be worth studying as philosophy. Indeed, one of the most important points that Nussbaum and Nehamas make is that there are different ways of understanding what philosophy looks like and what philosophers do. It should not surprise us that we would encounter different understandings of this in different cultures, and therapeutic philosophy not only helps us to appreciate the kind of philosophers that we find in, for instance, the Hellenistic schools of Greece and Rome, but also in other traditions in other parts of the world. Studying these aspects of the *Analects* can also deepen our appreciation for and understanding of therapeutic philosophy. First, when we consider Kongzi as an example of a therapeutic philosopher, it allows us to broaden the range of topics therapeutic philosophers have considered carefully and the values they have advocated. Second, recognizing that therapeutic philosophers can be found in traditions around the world gives us an additional reason to take the category of therapeutic philosophy seriously. It is not simply an idiosyncrasy or relic of Hellenistic culture, but a way of thinking about philosophy that can be found in diverse thinkers from a variety of periods and in a variety of cultures and places.

There is a good argument to be made for the view that Kongzi is the most influential thinker in world if influence is measured by the number of people who have lived according to one's vision of the good life.[18] Kongzi's influence is unparalleled not only due to the deep and pervasive cultural influence of Confucianism in East and Southeast Asia, but the endurance of this influence for more than 2,000 years in some of the largest populations in the world. Although many Confucians have played important roles in the continued influence of Confucianism, they have all sought to interpret, build upon, and defend Kongzi's teachings. If we consider Kongzi's thought alongside the work of other therapeutic philosophers, none of them compare in the degree to which their approaches and views were actually put into practice and tested over time. The fact that Kongzi's vision of the good life has had this kind of

enduring importance for so many people, in such diverse settings throughout history, should prompt us to consider the rich resources that he provides us with as a therapeutic philosopher.[19]

Notes

1. This is true even of those who maintain that philosophers should study the *Analects*. For instance, Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. call him "a *philosophe* rather than a theoretical philosopher" (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 4).

2. Van Norden writes that he hopes to sidestep these issues by stating that he will examine the teachings of Kongzi, the early Mohists, and Mengzi "from a particular sort of philosophical perspective. One can examine almost any text from a philosophical perspective, whether or not one regards that text as 'genuinely philosophical' " (Van Norden 2007: 1). For a comprehensive and compelling discussion of the ongoing marginalization of Less Commonly Taught philosophers and philosophies (including Confucianism) in the discipline of Philosophy, see Van Norden (2017).

p. 237 3. In this chapter all references are to the character of Kongzi as he is presented and understood in the received text of the *Analects* and in traditional commentaries. I contend that philosophers, like scholars in history, literature, and religious studies, can contribute to our understanding of and appreciation for the *Analects* through their distinctive training and concerns, and that studying the *Analects* can expand and deepen philosophers' understanding of a variety of questions. As a result, it is important to highlight the reasons why the *Analects* deserves to be studied by philosophers—particularly because philosophy is the only discipline in the humanities in which it continues to be acceptable to ignore Chinese and other non-Western sources.

4. While a comparative study of Hellenistic and Confucian methods of therapy and the different stated ends of the therapy is beyond the scope of this chapter, see Cline (2015) for a comparative discussion of Hellenistic and early Confucian views of the family's role in early moral cultivation, and see Olberding (2005a, 2005b) compared with Ivanhoe (2011) and Olberding (2011) for discussions of the views concerning grief in these traditions, a topic that highlights interesting comparisons and contrasts in this area.

5. By "self-cultivation" I mean theories about the cultivation of the self and not simply those that are initiated and controlled by individuals. For an incisive study of Confucian self-cultivation in this sense in both early and later Confucian thinkers, see Ivanhoe (2000). For sustained and detailed arguments for contemporary relevance of the *Analects*, including its therapeutic value in a variety of areas, see Ivanhoe (2013) and Cline (2020).

6. It is worth noting that Nehamas, unlike Nussbaum, does not include careful argumentation in his understanding of therapeutic philosophy. It is also important to note that careful argumentation *is* characteristic of subsequent Chinese texts like the *Mozi*, the *Mengzi*, and the *Xunzi*, even though, like the arguments found in Greek and Roman antiquity, they are not always the kinds of arguments that meet the standards of modern philosophers. For a detailed discussion of Mozi's arguments, see Van Norden (2007: 139–98); see also Van Norden (2017) on this issue more generally. For a discussion of Mengzi's arguments, including his use of thought experiments, see Ivanhoe (2000: 18–19). For a detailed discussion of the *Analects*, its presentation of Kongzi, the nature of its content, and its remarkable history and influence (including the commentarial tradition), see Cline (2021).

7. For Kongzi, the Way (*Dào* 道) of the former kings and sages resembles a well-trodden path that is defined by actively and continuously cultivating a particular set of virtues and following cultural practices such as the rites (*li* 禮). The latter are one of the primary ways in which one cultivates the virtues and nurtures the relationships that are central features of a good life. *Junzi* is Kongzi's term for the most highly cultivated person. The *junzi* embodies the full range of Confucian virtues but continues to exhibit an unwavering devotion to the path of self-cultivation.

8. Translations are my own unless otherwise specified. I leave references to certain key terms of art, such as *Rén* 仁 and *jūnzǐ* 君子, untranslated in all quotations from the *Analects*. For my translation of the text, see Cline (forthcoming).

9. The traditional mourning period seems to have been around 25 months (or *into* the third year) and involved eating ordinary millet, wearing rough hemp clothing, dwelling in a mourning hut, and refraining from enjoyable activities such as music. For insightful studies of mourning, death, and dying in the *Analects*, see Olberding (2011) and Ivanhoe (2011).

10. The last lines follow Slingerland (2003: 210); see also Watson (2007). In the *Analects*, *Ren* typically refers to the most

virtuous state of character and the highest state of goodness and humaneness, designating the accumulation and
p. 238 complete mastery of all of the Confucian ↳ virtues. For later thinkers like Mengzi, and in some places in the *Analects*, *Ren* is understood as benevolence.

11. For further discussion of this dimension of Confucianism, see Cline (2016).

12. Ivanhoe uses juggling as an illustration of these functions: ritual expresses and cultivates moral sensibilities and virtues, much like juggling displays and develops dexterity (Ivanhoe 1990: 491).

13. It is important to remember that some Western philosophers don't (or don't often) make arguments of this sort, either, including Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and James.

14. In general, Kongzi seems to think the need to amend or change rituals is the exception rather than the rule and most often defends a stricter adherence to traditional ritual practice. See, for example, 3.4, 3.17, 6.25, and 7.19.

15. For a discussion of these aspects of filial piety, see Ivanhoe (2007) and Cline (2012).

16. This might fall under the rubric of not opening a door for someone who not already struggling to understand (7.8) or not trying to carve rotten wood (5.10).

17. I focus here on Kongzi's views regarding the therapeutic value of ancestral sacrifices. For an analysis of Kongzi's views on the spirits and the secondary literature on this topic, see Cline (2013) and Cline (2021).

18. Ames and Rosemont point this out (1998: 2) as does Van Norden, who compares Kongzi's influence on his native tradition to the combined influence of Jesus and Socrates on the Western tradition (2002: 3).

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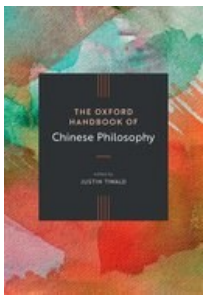

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CHAPTER

12 Being Spontaneous: Zhuangzi on Mastery

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Abstract

The theme of spontaneity has long been associated with Daoist philosophy. It refers to a more engaged and less formulaic approach to life. This discussion examines three stories about mastery in the *Zhuangzi*, a Daoist text from the Warring States period. All three involve the figure of Confucius, who takes on different roles in the stories: sometimes as Zhuangzian spokesperson; sometimes as inquirer, seeking to learn; and sometimes as an instructor who aims to impart Daoist insights but does not succeed. By considering the narratives in these accounts, including Confucius's roles in them, three key elements of spontaneity are articulated. They are: responsiveness as an epistemological attitude that seeks to engage with the world, the embodied and in-the-moment nature of spontaneity, and spontaneity's aversion to codification. These considerations generate a new understanding of spontaneity; apart from highlighting these features, it also claims that spontaneity comes at a cost.

Keywords: Zhuangzi, spontaneity, agency, Daoist philosophy, epistemology, Zhuangzi skill stories
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I. Introduction

The *Zhuangzi*, a Daoist text from the Warring States period (*zhan guo* 戰國), challenges existing pursuits and practices of its time through its use of imagery, metaphors, dialogues, open-ended questions, and other argumentative strategies. Among its imagery are its "skill stories":[1] anecdotal, narrative accounts of individuals masterfully engaged in a variety of commonplace activities such as swimming and butchering. The stories focus on a range of issues: they might question entrenched values and pursuits, scrutinize prevailing norms or practices, examine the way in which well-being is sought, or offer better models of life. In some of them, there is an audience who marvels at the superlative quality of the execution of the activity. These tend to highlight the ease with which the activities are undertaken, together with the unique, nontraditional way in which the masters' skills are acquired.

What are the masters doing in these stories, and what does the *Zhuangzi* seek to convey through them? This chapter seeks to understand a number of related epistemological issues that underlie the stories of mastery. It aims especially to investigate the question of "spontaneity" in the text, given that scholarly debates have identified it as a feature of Zhuangzian mastery. What makes this matter more intriguing is that there are no specific phrases in the *Zhuangzi* that refer to *agentive* spontaneity, in the way articulated in contemporary debates.[2] Therefore, to examine the idea of spontaneous agency in the *Zhuangzi*, I explore its place in the text's narratives on mastery. I consider what the masters are good at and how they have acquired mastery of their activities. Understanding these facets of Zhuangzi's epistemology will allow us to better appreciate what the *Zhuangzi* seeks to challenge, and what the stories might offer in informing the way we undertake tasks. Unlike current debates on spontaneity that champion its
p. 241 positive aspects, I also identify one of its facets that might cause concern. This is the issue ↳ of risk: if we encourage individuals to be spontaneous, we must also accept that they are taking certain things into their own hands. This means that things could go wrong in a way that habitual or formulaic actions typically do not.

To clarify what I mean by the epistemological issues in the *Zhuangzi*, and how they relate to the question of spontaneity, I focus on a cluster of terms associated with it, including "intuitive" (Maspero 1978), "antirational" (Graham 1981), and "know how." I discuss these interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*'s epistemology in Section II. Section III focuses on three of the skill stories, those that specifically involve the figure of Confucius. These are the stories of the cicada catcher, the ferryman, and the swimmer. Why have the authors included Confucius in these stories? Does the presence of the figure of Confucius serve to highlight specific features of Zhuangzian epistemology? I believe it does, and I demonstrate how this is so. Section IV considers how spontaneity might be conceived in light of the discussions in the previous two sections. It offers novel perspectives on how mastery involves spontaneous actions. Section V concludes.

II. Characterizations of the Zhuangzi's Approach to Knowledge and Skill

This section investigates a selection of terms used in scholarly debates to characterize the *Zhuangzi*'s epistemological focus on the basis of the mastery stories. The aim is to highlight some conceptual biases in them.

i. Intuitive and Mystical Knowledge

The Sinologist Henri Maspero, known for his work on Daoism, highlights the distinctive nature of the *Zhuangzi*'s approach to knowledge. He articulates this by dichotomizing the following: reason and intuition, intellectual and mystical activities, and Confucian and Daoist conceptions of knowledge. For Maspero, the *Zhuangzi*'s knowledge is intuitive and mystical, requiring that "[r]easoning itself must be abandoned" (Maspero 1978: 307). Maspero believes that these aspects of "true knowledge" are expressed in the story of the wheelwright called "Flat" (*bian* 扁) (*Zhuangzi* 13/64–74).[3] In this story, the wheelwright approaches Duke Huan (桓公), who is reading a book. The Duke tells Bian that he is reading the words of the sages (*sheng ren zhi yan* 聖人之言). In response, Bian boldly claims that the Duke is reading the "chaff and dregs of the men of old" (trans. Watson 1968: 152–53) as the sages have since passed away. Threatened with death if he does not provide a suitable answer for this arrogant remark, the wheelwright describes how he carves wheels with his hammer and chisel:

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> I feel it in my hand and respond (*ying* 應) to it with my heart-mind. I cannot put it into words, and yet I know exactly how things stand. (trans. author).

For Maspero, these remarks are indicative of an approach that *abandons* reason. What does Maspero mean by reason? He does not elaborate, but there are aspects of this story that present some clues. The sense of abandoning reason may have to do with the wheelwright's *responsive* approach to carving wheels, as contrasted with one that has been mapped out prior to the execution of the activity. The wheelwright works freehand with hammer and chisel; his carving is not guided by the use of measuring tools.[4] In relation to the same story, Maspero also contrasts Daoist philosophy with other ancient Chinese traditions, including Confucianism and Mohism. Whereas the latter two are "intellectual," he says, Daoist philosophy is mystical:

> What is peculiar to the school of [Laozi] and [Zhuangzi] is that, instead of being purely intellectual like that of Kongzi, or that of [Mozi], it is based principally upon the practice of mysticism. (Maspero 1978: 307).

The methods of mysticism, we are told, stand in contrast to those of science and in *philosophical debates*: "the [Daoist] aim, as with all the schools of the day, was to acquire sagehood, but science was inadequate to lead to it, and so was the discussion of philosophical ideas" (307). But, for Maspero, this is not Daoism's loss. Indeed, the Daoist pursuit of sagehood is a different enterprise from these other projects humans undertake, and qualitatively superior to them. (On his account, the phrase "Daoist philosophy" could well be a misnomer!). Apart from these contrasts, Maspero does not provide a positive account of what intuitive thinking is, although he provides examples of mystical practices.[5] As I will demonstrate, even though Maspero is intrigued by mysticism, his terms of reference and use of dichotomies such as intellectual-mystical express the discourse of a particular set of debates that may not have appropriately captured the mood and intellectual context of the pre-Qin (秦) period (pre-221 BCE).

ii. Antirational Knowledge

The idea that the *Zhuangzi* takes a nonrational approach—or even an *anti*rationalist one—was famously articulated by Angus C. Graham, a leading intellectual historian of Chinese thought. The *Zhuangzi* had a special place in Graham's work. In his notes accompanying his influential translation of the *Zhuangzi*, Graham discusses the views of Chapter 2 (*qi wu lun* 齊物論), a chapter that attends to epistemological issues. Characterizing Zhuangzi as one of the "great anti-rationalists," Graham argues that the *Zhuangzi*'s position in this chapter is that

> we should abandon reason for the immediate experience of an undifferentiated world, transforming "All are one" from a moral into a mystical affirmation. (Graham 1981: 9)[6]

p. 243 Graham's vocabulary is remarkably similar to Maspero's, and more extreme: not only does the *Zhuangzi* not follow the path of reason; it is *anti*rational. In addition, Graham's vocabulary reflects his familiarity with modern Anglophone philosophical debates, such as the alignment of reason with morality, and with debates on knowing-how and knowing-that.

iii. Knowing-How

Gilbert Ryle first championed the significance of knowing-how, noting its lack of presence in the philosophical literature, which prioritized knowing-that (Ryle 1946). Adopting Ryle's proposal, Graham and others[7] have advocated that in the *Zhuangzi*, knowledge of *dao*, exemplified in the mastery stories, is knowledge-how. Knowledge-how is practical and procedural, in contrast to the focus on propositional knowledge in knowing-that. Graham's analysis takes the interesting line that the kind of performance-based activity undertaken by the masters may be considered *intelligent* (1985: 5–6). In fact, although Graham does not acknowledge this in his discussion, the idea of intelligent action was specifically raised by Ryle. Ryle proposed that knowing-how may be considered *intelligent*, and that it is not peculiar to think that there are *intelligent actions*. Further, these intelligent actions are, simply, *know-how*, and nothing more (1946: 9, 1949: 32); they are intelligent not because they have been activated or generated by knowledge-that. Graham incorporates the idea of intelligent action into his characterization of the stories on skill. The stories about the craftsmen

> are always especially illuminating to a Westerner grappling to understand [Daoism]. We learn from them that the [Daoist] art of living is a supremely intelligent responsiveness which would be undermined by analysing and choosing, and that grasping the Way is an unverbalizable "knowing how" rather than "knowing that." (1989: 186)

Graham, like Maspero, uses the story of the wheelwright to emphasize that the processes of reason, including analysis, *undermines* the exercise of skill (1983).[8]

iv. Spontaneity

In his positive account of Zhuangzian knowledge, Graham places *spontaneity* at the heart of skill. For Graham, Daoist skill stands in contrast to the Confucian enterprise of "cultivating dexterity in the service of ends" (Graham 1983). Does this mean we should not expect spontaneity in Confucian philosophy? And what are the features of Daoist spontaneity? Let us consider the second question in light of Philip Ivanhoe's discussion of spontaneity in the *Zhuangzi*. Ivanhoe reiterates the themes raised so far, placing them in the context of debates on the *Zhuangzi*'s skepticism:

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> [Zhuangzi] is an epistemological skeptic, but only of a *certain kind* of knowledge, i.e. intellectual knowledge. He is not at all skeptical about *intuitive knowledge*. The difference between these two kinds of knowledge roughly follows Gilbert Ryle's distinction between *knowing that* and *knowing how*. For Zhuangzi, knowledge of the *Dao* is a kind of *knowing how*; it is intuitive and spontaneous knowledge of how to act in accordance with the *Dao*. (Ivanhoe 1993: 648)[9]

Ivanhoe adds an important feature of Zhuangzian knowledge of *dao*: its focal idea is not what knowledge seeks, but the state of mind with which a person seeks it (642). The aim is to act in accord with *dao*, to develop "an intuitive knack which one must come to feel for oneself" (650). For Ivanhoe, while both Confucian and Daoist texts advocate engagement with the world, the Confucian adherence to the "completed heart" (*cheng xin* 成心; *Zhuangzi* 2/21–27) as the authority curtails spontaneity (Ivanhoe: 649).

To elaborate, the idea of the completed heart-mind crystallizes the *Zhuangzi*'s concerns that people whose lives have been shaped by a set of invariant norms will come to see everything according to those norms.[10] Their heart-minds are *complete* as these norms have come to *fruition* in them: their decisions and actions are driven by their successfully cultivated heart-minds.

To conclude, I have sought in this discussion to provide a sample of how the epistemological features of the *Zhuangzi* relating to spontaneity have been portrayed. As we have seen, these include references to a range of terms including "mystical knowledge," "true knowledge," "ineffability," "intuition," "antirationalist knowledge," and "knowing-how." Correspondingly, terms such as "reason," "reasoning," "intellect," "science," and even "philosophical ideas" are seen as incompatible with Zhuangzi's philosophy or as obstructing the ways of life promoted in the *Zhuangzi*. In the following section, we investigate three stories about mastery to help refine our understanding of what the *Zhuangzi* seeks to promote.

III. The Masters in Conversation with Confucius

The analysis in this section focuses on three passages that involve Confucius. The aim is to get a sense of how the text characterizes mastery in light of the contrasts that arise in the conversations between the respective masters and Confucius. The three passages are in the "The Attainment of Life" (*da sheng* 達生) chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.

i. The Hunchback Cicada Catcher (ju lü zhe 痀僂者) (*Zhuangzi* 19/17–21)

In this story, Confucius encounters a hunchback cicada catcher, "catching cicadas with a sticky pole as easily as though he were
p. 245 grabbing them with his hand" (trans. Watson ↳ 1968: 199). Intrigued, Confucius asks the cicada catcher: "What skill (*qiao* 巧) you have! Is there *dao*?" The cicada catcher replies in the affirmative to the question about *dao*, saying that *he* has it (*wo you dao ye* 我有道也).[11] He then provides a detailed explanation of his cultivation processes.

The first component involves balancing pellets on a pole. The cicada catcher needs to have a feel for his pole and to manipulate it well so that the sticky adhesive at one end attaches to cicada wings. Training his control of the pole, he attempts over five or six months to balance two pellets on it. Then he attempts with three, and then five. He articulates this progression in his learning, as well as the success conditions for each stage. By the time he can balance five pellets without them falling off the pole, he knows that "it will be as easy as grabbing them with my hand" (199). The cicada catcher's practice is both *enabled* and *reinforced* by knowledge-that, of the success conditions, of where he is at in relation to them, and, in general, of his agility with the pole that makes him better at catching cicadas.

Likewise—and this is the second component of his training—he has acquired knowledge-that of cicada habits and habitats, knowing to hold his body like a gnarled tree trunk and his arm as if it were a dried branch. Though not made explicit, he would have acquired this knowledge of cicada habitats through close observation of the cicadas in their environments. Additionally, he knows how to, and knows to, hold his body *as if* (*ruo* 若) it were a stiff tree trunk. He adopts relevant actions and gestures and comports his body so as not to scare off the cicadas. It is difficult to delineate where the cicada catcher's knowledge-that ends, and where his knowledge-how begins; they seem integrated in his mastery of cicada catching.

Third, he highlights his attentiveness to cicada wings, for the sticky end of the pole must attach to the wings. He says,

> No matter how expansive heaven and earth are, and how innumerable things are, I am aware of nothing but cicada wings. Neither turning nor leaning, I do not let the ten thousand things take the place of cicada wings. How can I not succeed in taking them? (adapted from the translation by Watson 1968: 199)

The cicada catcher is so absorbed in observing cicada wings that nothing else in the world (the manifold "ten thousand things"; *wan wu zhi duo* 萬物之多) distracts him. The depth of engagement seems to be a recurrent feature in a number of the skill stories, and we will touch on this again in the next story about the ferryman. Although not explicitly stated, it would appear that this level of absorption is possible only with extended and arduous discipline, for it is only after his extended training that the cicada catcher is not fumbling, or falling over, or alerting the cicadas to his presence. Confucius is overawed by both the skill and the explanation. Turning to his followers, he says to them, "An undivided will and a concentrated spirit—this may be said of this hunchbacked gentleman?" (200). Confucius in this final statement takes on the role of *instructor*, telling his followers about the engaged concentration of the cicada catcher and upholding him as a model to be emulated.

ii. The Ferryman (*jin ren* 津人) (*Zhuangzi* 19/22–26)

YAN Yuan, perhaps the most favored of Confucius' followers,[12] seeks Confucius's counsel regarding his encounter with a ferryman impressively steering his boat, as if he were a spirit (*ruo shen* 若神). Intrigued by the ferryman's skill, YAN Yuan asked him whether it is possible to learn to steer a ferry. The ferryman answered Yes, it is, followed by a cryptic remark that "It is a good swimmer who can usually do it. If he can swim underwater, he can operate a boat even if he has never seen one before" (trans. Ziporyn 2020: 151). However, the ferryman does not elaborate on the learning process, nor does he say why it will be easier for those who can swim underwater. When YAN Yuan asked him to explain his comments, the ferryman refused to do so.

Thus, YAN Yuan has come to seek Confucius's advice, wondering if Confucius might be able to enlighten him on the ferryman's skill and its acquisition. Without hesitation, Confucius outlines how important it is to develop familiarity with, and acceptance of, the unpredictable nature of water. Confucius explained that a good swimmer is capable of learning because he has forgotten the water (*wang shui* 忘水). Why is it important to forget the water? Perhaps one has to try to forget one's *fear* of water and its associated perils. Confucius also explains that a person who is comfortable underwater would fare better as he is *prepared* for setbacks, hence being at ease in the water:

> One who can swim underwater can operate a boat even if he's never seen one before because to him the surging water is no different from a gentle hill, and a capsizing boat just like an overturning cart. Even if his vessel is tossed and flipped in all directions, it doesn't get to him, so he is relaxed and leisurely wherever he sails. (trans. Ziporyn 2020: 151)

In the final section of the story, Confucius, assuming the role of spokesperson for the *Zhuangzi* and instructing YAN Yuan, goes beyond the ferryman's advice. He encourages YAN Yuan to stay focused on the task and not be distracted by factors external to the quality of the engagement. Confucius uses examples of different prizes in an archery competition to illustrate his point, saying that if a person was competing for gold, he would be a nervous wreck. But, in fact, Confucius continues, the person's, "native skill is the same … but because he has something to lose, he overvalues the external. Whenever the external is prized, the internal gets clumsy" (trans. Ziporyn 2020: 151).

The importance of *forgetting* is reinforced and extended in Confucius's instruction of YAN Yuan in this final section. Not only should a person forget the water; she should also act without heed for outcomes that merely track conventional values (forgetting

conventional values). This story, like that of the cicada catcher, emphasizes the *quality* of the ferryman's engagement in his activity. Here, both the description of the ferryman being "like a spirit" and the symbolism of the underwater swimmer's *immersion* suggest a level of involvement quite removed from the ways in which actions are typically geared toward goals.[13] Both stories take attunement to relevant contexts as a central theme: the cicada catcher trains himself to balance pellets on his pole and holds his body to resemble
p. 247 ↳ a tree; the ferryman forgets (the perils of) the water and therefore is at ease when steering the ferry, not worried about setbacks or capsizing. In the final story (next), the issue of a person's alignment with their environment is yet more pronounced.

iii. Swimming (*dao shui* 蹈水) (*Zhuangzi* 19/49–54)

Confucius was out for a walk with his followers when they passed by magnificent cascades of "thirty fathoms." Naturally, nothing could swim in the water at the base of these cascades. Hence, Confucius was deeply distressed when he saw a man swimming in the water; he comes to the conclusion that the man had intended to take his own life. But, to Confucius's surprise, the man emerges from the treacherous waters a couple of hundred paces down the bank. He strolls along the bank, wet hair streaming down, singing a song. Running after him, Confucius asked, "I thought you were a ghost, but now, up close, I see you're a man. May I ask if you have a *dao* of treading water?" (adapted from the translation by Watson 1968: 204–5).

The swimmer responds, saying, "*I* have no *dao*" (*wu wu dao* 吾無道). But then immediately elaborates on how he is comfortable swimming in the rough waters

> I began with what was originally there, developed what was natural (to me), and reached complete alignment with destiny. I enter the swirls and emerge with the currents, following the way (*dao*) of the waters without thought of my (own) self. That's how I can tread water. (trans. author)

The swimmer's account incorporates close, careful observations of the environment (in this case, the treacherous waters) in order to align himself with it. His articulation of what he feels at home in, and how he should *swim* in these waters demonstrates the acuity in his knowledge about these waters (knowledge-that). And, of course, his very ability to swim in it, without being harmed, attests to his knowledge-how. Are we even able to draw a line between knowledge-that and knowledge-how, as manifest in the swimmer's actions? Is this not the intelligent action Ryle and Graham speak of?

The level of self-awareness in this account seems inconsistent with the swimmer's statement that he has no *dao*. We have seen in Section II how knowledge of *dao* is represented as mystical rather than intellectual, and intuitive rather than rational. These labels seem out of place, however, in the swimmer's *lucidity* about how he can be safe in these waters. The swimmer claims that *he* has no *dao*. What is the significance of this claim? I suggest there are two ways of looking at it. First, the swimmer's having no *dao* might be a fitting response if he believed that Confucius was urging him to impart a *way* (*dao*) to swim in these waters. Although the swimmer himself negotiates the dangerous waters successfully, he cannot *recommend* a method for Confucius, or for anyone else, successfully to swim in these dangerous waters. In brief, he is not speaking about a generalized *dao* of swimming these waters, *because there is none*. There might be a *dao* for Confucius to swim in these waters, but it will not result from the swimmer's
p. 248 speaking ↳ about it. We investigate the question of unspeakability or wordlessness in the next section; it reflects the *Zhuangzi*'s views about the nature of some activities, for which cultivation necessarily involves first-person direct engagement and active reflections, in relevant contexts—features of action that are difficult to convey in words.

A different explanation for the swimmer's having no *dao* relates to the swimmer's alignment with the water. The swimmer states that he *follows* the *dao* of the waters (*cong shui zhi dao* 從水之道). This indicates that, were he to have *his dao*, it would likely conflict with the *dao* of the raging waters, thus placing him in grave danger. Therefore, he needs to not assert his *own dao* in this context, which seems consistent with the *Zhuangzi*'s views on forgetting the self.[14] Perhaps, if Confucius were to attempt to swim in these waters, his *dao*—his fear of the waters—would be ever present. Because his *dao* would generate actions that conflict with the *dao* of the waters, it is highly likely that Confucius would have succumbed to its currents. Therefore, it is in the swimmer's not contending with the waters that he claims not to have *dao*. This story expresses a nuanced understanding of the swimmer's *control* of his swimming in these waters. In swimming *with no dao*, he is not relinquishing agency. Rather, it is his agentive decision *in this case* to not have (a) *dao*.

To conclude our discussion in this section, there are a number of similarities across the three stories. First, intensive *and thoughtful* cultivation is required in order to master these activities. The process of cultivation involves placing oneself appropriately in *alignment* with salient environing conditions of the activity. Doing so requires an attitude that seeks to engage or, in other words, prepare to be responsive. Second, although each expert elaborates on their respective activities, their expertise is personal and cannot fully be articulated in words. Third, they each provide accounts of their experiences, but there seems to be some reluctance to teach or instruct others. In the next section, by considering these questions, I aim to develop a nuanced account of Zhuangzian spontaneity.

IV. Spontaneous Actions in the *Zhuangzi*

Thoughtfully planned and monitored cultivation is critical to the attainment of mastery: the cicada catcher articulates in detail the levels of progression involved in his training, the ferryman talks about different levels of embodied skill in swimming, and the swimmer presents the different components of his alignment with the natural world that have contributed to his success. The conversations between the masters and Confucius or YAN Yuan give pause to whether the *Zhuangzi* is skeptical about intellectual knowledge, and whether it requires the abandonment of reason. A corollary to this issue is whether the term "intuitive" appropriately captures the masters' knowledge, especially if it is used in contradistinction to reason.

p. 249 Defenders of Maspero's and Graham's accounts might well accept that the masters' reflective ruminations are part of the cultivation process, but they might insist, on the other hand, that the ruminations should be put aside at the moment of action (e.g., Graham 1983: 12–13). This view accepts that the masters have developed coherent plans for cultivation, have intelligently grasped what they need to know, and have successfully incorporated their knowledge into developing their capacities for action. However, in masterful *performances*, the metaphorical ladder of reason and the intellect is cast aside: let reason cease so that *dao* may begin! It seems, on this view, that cogitating during the performance actually disrupts or obstructs *dao*. This view may be supported by debates in the philosophy of action that problematize the idea of higher-order reflection as a feature of agency. For instance, David Velleman is wary that requiring higher-order reflections may precipitate a person's detachment from her motivations (2008). He proposes that Zhuangzian consummate agency; by contrast, he avoids such detachment by advocating that we become "so engrossed in an activity that we stop reflecting and lose ourselves" (182).[15] According to him, this picture of "higher wantonness" characterizes many of the *Zhuangzi*'s masters, for whom self-regulation is unnecessary, but which can be called upon when needed. An account like this, wary of a requirement of oversight during performance, might help mitigate claims that the *Zhuangzi* is antirational or skeptical about intellectual knowledge. However, it only goes part way. This is because, first, in Velleman's account, such oversight is *unnecessary* in performance whereas for Maspero and Graham, intellection and reason *obstruct dao*-performances. Second, it is not clear in the latter views that the *Zhuangzi*'s concerns about reason and the intellect relate specifically to the issue of higher-order reflection in the course of performing one's activity. Third, the masters' *attentiveness* to aspects of their activities needs to be accounted for (even if it is not higher-order reflection), and the term "intuitive" is too vague to properly represent what is going on in these stories. In the following discussion, I develop three dimensions of spontaneity following the questions raised in the previous section: an attitude of responsiveness, first-person experience that is ineffable, and a reluctance to instruct.

i. Spontaneity and Responsiveness

The masters' attentiveness in the course of their activity is a prerequisite for their appropriate *alignment* with the conditions of their activity. Their actions are responsively aligned with potential constraints or enablers in their contexts of action, such as the habits and habitats of cicadas, the nature of water, and how humans fare in water, to name a few. But what is alignment and, accordingly, how might we understand responsiveness? The three stories may serve as examples. The cicada catcher trains his body to resemble the natural habitat of cicadas by *mimicking* the characteristics of a tree. If he were to approach cicadas in the same way he approaches a human being, his cicada catching attempts would have failed. By contrast, mimicry is not part of the ferryman's story.
p. 250 Rather, the alignment is *attitudinal*. A swimmer understands water whereas an ↳ underwater swimmer *expects* the water's ebbs and flows. Not seeing these as setbacks, he has the right dispositions to steer ferries. The underwater swimmer immerses himself in water, feeling at home in—rather than *in spite of*—its thrusts and ebbs. In the third story, the swimmer aligns with the strong currents by not resisting them and, in doing so, does not meet with the fate of someone who, being fearful of the water ('s *dao*), tries to resist it.

Responsiveness is a key feature of the processes associated with alignment. Some aspects of responsiveness are expressed in the term *ying* (應). Ying indicates a person's openness to the world, as well as readiness to engage with emergent circumstances. It is a complex process that involves accurately grasping details of the human condition, understanding human capacities and their limitations, and appreciating the reach of humankind in relation to what is naturally given (*tian* 天, often translated as "Heaven"). Therefore, the *Zhuangzi* foregrounds percipience about how humanity aligns with the heavenly.[16] And, indeed, ying is a quality of Zhuangzian ideal life.[17] In the chapter entitled "Rotations of Heaven" (*tian yun* 天運), there is a conversation between YAN Yuan and the music master Jin. Jin represents the perspective of the *Zhuangzi* and speaks of how Confucius is unaccommodating in his promotion of ideals. He will not succeed, Jin says, because his approach is context insensitive. Jin uses analogies to illustrate his point:

> For traveling on water, there is nothing better than a boat. But for traveling on land, there is nothing better than a carriage. If you tried your whole life long to push a boat along on dry land because it's a good vehicle for the water, you would not get it to budge even a few feet. Are not the past and the present as different as water and land? Are not the ways of Zhou and Lu like the boat and the carriage? Now he tries to practice the ways of Zhou in the state of Lu—that is like pushing a boat over dry land: a lot of toilsome labor with no result, which will surely bring calamitous harm to his own person. He has not learned the methodless tradition, which responds to all things without being thwarted by any of them. (*Zhuangzi* 14/35–38; trans. Ziporyn 2020: 121–22)

Confucius is represented here as someone who adheres inflexibly to a set of norms. Jin further illustrates his point with a compelling analogy between the Duke of Zhou, a revered figure in the *Analects*, and a monkey:

> Thus rituals, principles, standards, and codes must change in response to the times. If you dress up a monkey in the robes of the Duke of Zhou, it will surely bite and gnaw and rip at them, not satisfied until it has torn them completely off of its body. If we really look at the difference between the past and the future, we see that it is as great as the difference between the monkey and the Duke of Zhou. (*Zhuangzi* 14/40; trans. Ziporyn 2020: 121–22).

Confucius's inflexibility is also a part of the swimmer's story. His trepidation about the safety of the swimmer is fueled by fear of the
p. 251 cascades, seeing them as dangerous and life ↳ threatening. This stands in stark contrast to the ease with which the swimmer follows the water's *dao*. It now becomes clear why the swimmer could not have recommended a *dao* of swimming to Confucius, given Confucius's inability to *respond appropriately* to the water's *dao*. Confucius's fear of the water is the stumbling block that is likely to cost him his life, ironically confirming that he *should* fear the water.[18]

The perceived contrasts between the two traditions are important. The concern in the *Zhuangzi* is that cultivation associated with the Confucian tradition aims to instill commitment to standards.[19] The commitment requires, it seems, adherence to a set of values that inevitably drive a person's engagement with the world. It is, indeed, a feature of the "completed heart-mind" discussed earlier. Within this framework, there is little or no room for a person to respond *spontaneously* to emergent circumstances. By contrast, the responsiveness embodied by many of the masters in the *Zhuangzi* are examples of spontaneous action. Attending to cicada wings to

tap the sticky end of the pole on them, forgetting water,[20] and getting into the swirls of the water, are spontaneous actions as they arise from a person's engagement with the activity and rely on the agent's initiative. These responses are neither planned nor rehearsed, as it is not possible to do so *prior* to the activity itself. It is of course possible, perhaps even necessary, to equip oneself to undertake spontaneous actions by developing relevant capacities. However, the cultivation undertaken by the Zhuangzian masters does not aim to entrench their practices in existing courses of action. Rather, it prepares them to take their cues from environmental contexts, an undertaking that requires an *attitudinal commitment* to engaging with the world. The issue here concerns the nature of cultivation qua preparation for engagement. Unlike Velleman's discussion (2008), which focuses on agentive higher-order reflections, the account takes a longitudinal account of agency, including the cultivation process that is a prerequisite for spontaneous action. The view here is supported by Chris Fraser's proposal that successful performances rely on a person's developing "reliable differential responsive dispositions" (Fraser 2009: 226). Having responsive dispositions helps highlight a person's practical ability to discriminate between salient features across scenarios. Speaking generally of the Chinese tradition, he claims that the aim is to acquire "robust, reliable dispositions" to act according to our social roles in accordance with patterns of activity (226).[21]

Let us now return to the two questions raised earlier: What is alignment, and, accordingly, how might we understand responsiveness? To consider these questions, I draw on Brian Bruya's account of spontaneity in the *Zhuangzi* (2010). According to Bruya, one primary element of Zhuangzian spontaneity is "wholeness," comprised of two elements (215–16). First, "collection" is the process of grasping the relevant domain of the activity and its variable elements (such as cicada wings). Second, "shedding" is a process that eliminates obstructions or distractions in order to facilitate focus on the variable elements of the activity.[22] For Bruya, collection and shedding work in tandem to capture the holistic way in which a Zhuangzian master approaches his activity.[23] Bruya's account helps crystallize the idea of alignment expressed in the examples discussed earlier. It helps articulate the mechanics of what I have referred
 to as "alignment" in my discussion. In Bruya's analysis, responsiveness as an *attitude* is likewise a major aspect of ↳ spontaneous action: "What we see in the world can originally be felt, and it is through this external arousal and internal responsiveness to it that one responds spontaneously" (216). In line with this and my earlier analysis, I suggest that responsiveness is an *epistemological attitude* that seeks to take cues from the world to inform *fitting* action. This central aspect of Zhuangzian spontaneity is more than a process. It is *a way of seeing the world*, attentively, and seeking fit where appropriate. This account removes some of the mystery associated with the term "intuitive."[24]

ii. Spontaneity and Firsthand Experience

The masters provide detailed information about their cultivation processes but, in contrast, mastery is *performed*. Among the stories discussed, most telling is the ferryman's silence when YAN Yuan requests elaboration. The ferryman does not hesitate to affirm that ferrying a boat *can* be learned and then refuses to tell YAN Yuan any more. This brings up the question of the kind of information imparted by the masters: nothing about what they *see* or *feel* has been articulated. We are told *that* the cicada catcher looks attentively at cicada wings, but not what he *sees*. Likewise, the swimmer enters the whirls in the water, but we are not told *how* he experiences that. These experiences of mastery are irreducibly personal. All three masters, and others in the *Zhuangzi*, *own* their experiences. The cicada catcher says to Confucius, "*I* have *dao*" (*wo you dao ye* 我有道也). By contrast, the swimmer emphasizes that *he* has no *dao* (*wu dao* 吾無道).

I suggest that, in these stories, the masters offer *personalized accounts* of how they have attained mastery, and not *instructions* for all others. For instance, will the cicada catcher's account serve to instruct Confucius and his followers? Can a hunchback propose a learning plan for someone who is not, or vice versa? I believe the cicada catcher's hunchback has a more significant place in the story than acknowledged in scholarly debates. In my view, the detail of the hunchback serves to highlight the distinctiveness of the cicada catcher's experiences. It points us to the idea of *embodiment*, the general view that our bodies, and not just our minds, are central to our existence. The view of embodiment, famously articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962), does not merely challenge mind–body dualism. Its various versions emphasize that how we *think* is shaped by the experiences we have. And our experiences, in turn, depend on our having bodies with specific sensory and perceptual organs.[25] According to this view, the cicada catcher's program is specific to *his* acquisition of mastery,[26] just as in the case of the swimmer, who has grown up by the hills near the cascades.

The personalized nature of mastery would render many aspects of it *ineffable*. This is closely related to the themes of "wordlessness" (*wu yan* 無言; *Zhuangzi* 14/27, 27/5–10) and "wordless teaching" (*bu yan zhi jiao* 不言之教; 5/1–13; 22/5–13) mentioned elsewhere

in the *Zhuangzi*. "Wordlessness" is an approach that contrasts with the promulgation of norms and practices through language or words (*yan* 言). The story that best brings this out is Duke Huan's reading the words of sages in the story of the wheelwright.

p. 253 Normative practices such as ritual propriety (*li* 禮) in Confucian philosophy ↳ are in themselves a language as they facilitate and guide human interactions.[27] They are promoted through a common repository of knowledge, reinforced by the examples of sages, reading texts such as the *Book of Poetry*, and being instructed by those who are more advanced in the stages of cultivation (*Analects* 19.22; 17.9). By contrast, the Zhuangzian masters utilize a mix of learning strategies that they themselves have developed, including careful observation of particular environments, grueling physical discipline, and attentiveness to contextual cues in specific situations. In brief, unlike the entrenched and reinforced practices of the Confucians, the *Zhuangzi* offers *diversified*, individualized, methods of learning.

At the crux of mastery is an individual's response to the situation. It arises spontaneously, *in the course of* each person's engagement in their activity. Mastery *defies codification*, thus rendering it seemingly "mystical" or "intuitive." Certainly, in comparison with the stipulated norms in Confucian and Mohist philosophy, for example, Zhuangzian mastery seems elusive. This is because, in the *Zhuangzi*, spontaneity is necessarily embodied.

iii. Spontaneity, Learning, and Teaching

The masters' learning processes are geared toward developing sensitivity to salient factors in their contexts of action. There is a palpable sense of self-directedness in their accounts of cultivation. If this is the case, would they be attempting to *instruct* Confucius and his followers?

Yet, some teaching occurs in these stories, and we should investigate the role of Confucius in them. Confucius has a range of roles, including as an inquirer, hoping to learn; as a teacher, distilling the wisdom of the masters to his followers; and as a spokesperson for Zhuangzist wisdom. In the story of the ferryman, Confucius is a spokesperson for the ferryman: he elaborates on what the ferryman refuses to say to YAN Yuan and then continues to get to more fundamental matters about not being distracted by considerations external to the quality of the performance.

In the story of the swimmer, Confucius seeks to be instructed by the swimmer. We come away from this story thinking that it is *not* possible for Confucius to swim, much less be comfortable in the water at this point in time. We have already considered that it would be foolish for Confucius to attempt to enter the water, as his preconceived ideas about its threats would almost guarantee his demise. We could say that Confucius's *completed heart-mind* would operate here, blocking his engagement with the waters. But there is more. When Confucius asks him to speak about his *dao* of swimming, the swimmer says,

> Born among the hills, I first came to feel safely at home there among the hills—that's the given. Gravitating toward the water as I grew up, I then came to feel safely at home in the water—those are my (natural) dispositions. And to be thus and so without knowing how or why I am thus and so—that's destiny. (adapted from the translation by Ziporyn 2020: 154)

p. 254 The conditions of the swimmer's life, his natural dispositions, and his destiny are his own. This is *not* Confucius's life; his place is with those in public office. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Confucius will swim in these waters the way the swimmer does, unless he immerses himself in this environment (which in itself is a necessary but not a sufficient condition).

The cicada catcher story begins with Confucius keen to learn. But it ends with him being the teacher, distilling Zhuangzian wisdom to his followers. As I will demonstrate, it is not clear that Confucius's teaching is successful.

After the cicada catcher's extended explanation of his training program, Confucius turns to his followers, *instructing them*, "An undivided will and a concentrated spirit—this may be said of this hunchbacked gentleman!" (adapted from the translation by Watson 1968: 200). It seems odd that the cicada catcher's detailed explanation has been reduced to a single statement. The complexities of the *embodied* cultivation process have been omitted; the cicada catcher's breadth of experience is no more than the quality of his attentiveness and engrossment (*yong zhi bu fen, nai ning yu shen* 用志不分, 乃凝於神). The terseness of Confucius's instruction might reflect Confucius's recognition that the cicada catcher's program is *inapplicable* to him and his followers (given that they are

not hunchbacked, as far as we know). Or perhaps the story spoofs the way in which Confucius eagerly attempts to convey the unspeakable in words. In either case, the aim to instruct misses the mark.

In some of its mastery stories and across the text, the *Zhuangzi* is critical of the ways in which norms were promulgated. Not only were the goals misdirected, as they promoted only one set of acceptable values (cf. *Zhuangzi* 2/25–27); they deprived people of the opportunity to learn how to respond spontaneously in their engagements. According to Guo Xiang (252–312 CE), an influential early commentator of the *Zhuangzi*, sages, whose actions are spontaneous, *leave no traces* (*ji* 跡). Guo Xiang takes this idea from the *Zhuangzi* (20/28–37), drawing upon it to criticize the approaches taken in official life.[28] From Guo's perspective, thinkers were interpreting the classics as if they were traces—normative handbooks, so to speak. Guo laments that it is unfortunate that the sage's spontaneous actions are misunderstood *as traces*, and adhered to (see Ziporyn 2003: 31, 36).

These reflections help illuminate our discussion of the *Zhuangzi*'s views on the nature of instruction. We have seen how the figure of Confucius takes on different roles in the three stories. In the ferryman story, Confucius seems to be a spokesperson for Zhuangzian wisdom in his instruction of YAN Yuan, although there is a lingering question concerning why the ferryman himself refuses to speak (perhaps he is not leaving traces). Confucius's comments, moreover, offer only a generalized view of the importance of not being distracted. In the story of the swimmer in dangerous waters, Confucius sought instruction, but, quite possibly, he comes to realize that swimming in these waters is not for him. Yet, perhaps he *has learned* something more valuable from this encounter: there are no traces—tracks—for him to follow. Finally, the cicada catcher story portrays Confucius as instructor, in his attempts to leave tracks for his followers. But we also see how generalized his instructions are, lacking the rich detail provided by the cicada catcher.

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V. Conclusion

In this discussion, I have attempted to identify features of Zhuangzian spontaneity. I propose that it is possible to provide a more nuanced account of it if we do not rely on fitting the *Zhuangzi*'s approaches within Western epistemology's entrenched dichotomies. The three stories we have examined show that the masters are reflectively self-aware in what mastery requires, systematic in their plans for cultivation, adept at handling the complex components of their activities, and articulate in recounting what has worked for them. In addition, they approach cultivation with a view to developing capacities for responsive action. Human mediation—in the form of instructions with clear goals and expectations—would in fact stand in the way of their engagement in the contexts of their respective activities. The methodological self-awareness of these masters is nothing like what the phrases "antirational" or "mystical" imply.

I have outlined three aspects of spontaneity in this discussion. First, its central feature is responsiveness, an epistemological attitude that seeks to engage with the world, in contrast to one that fits the world into its categories. Second, the *experience* of spontaneity occurs in the moment of engagement. Therefore, the cultivation programs the masters undertake are to a degree personalized, embodied, and self-directed. On this basis, the *Zhuangzi* offers a variety of ways of learning, for there is no one way to be spontaneous. Third, being spontaneous is not codifiable, and therefore it cannot be packaged into a set of instructions. Therefore, the approach to impose a set of standards for one and all is inconsistent with Zhuangzian spontaneity.

The *Zhuangzi* offers an approach to life that involves a fine-tuned balance between a cultivated, engaged life and one that is at the same time spontaneous and nonhabitual. An important epistemological question arising from this view concerns how we may avoid habitual and unthinking engagements with the world. The denunciation of the completed heart-mind is fundamentally driven by a concern that it threatens the ideal life, which is open, and *incomplete*. This evokes the Zhuangzian theme of "uselessness" (*wu yong* 無用), which is a characteristic of things that have the virtue of being *incomplete* and open to different uses (*Zhuangzi* 1/35–42).[29] For, after all, if we situate humanity within the manifold, we realize that there are diverse and endless possibilities. How can it be, therefore, that there is *one* pursuit for all of humanity? Perhaps this is also why there are *different* stories about skill in the text, rather than one model of the ideal life.[30]

At the heart of the *Zhuangzi*'s conception of spontaneity lies the question of freedom, and its corollary, vulnerability. Freedom—the capacity to exercise initiative—is necessary for the responsiveness that occurs in the moment of engagement. The capacity for initiative is a hallmark of Zhuangzian agency; it is a prerequisite for a person's *being spontaneous*. The *Zhuangzi* particularly values

human initiative precisely because of life's many constraints, given to us in the cosmic and natural spheres, and manifest in our social and political domains. Its stories about mastery tell of how individuals recognize these conditions of life and work with them.
p. 256 They also speak against an approach that channels ↳ all human energies toward shaping society according to an unaccommodating vision. And, if we take a Zhuangzian approach that encourages self-directedness and initiative, we must also accept that risks might arise as the exercise of initiative incorporates more open-endedness. We will be more vulnerable in a Zhuangzian approach, as compared with one that champions the entrenched and familiar. We would be like the swimmer in the waters at the dangerous cascades, rather than Confucius standing by the bank and fearing for his life. Confucius might drown in the waters if he misjudges his capacities (instead of abiding by his acquired fear of it). The figure Confucius helps the text articulate two alternative models of life: one that is constrained by ingrained attitudes and evaluations of the world, and the other that embraces engagement with it. The *Zhuangzi* is emphatic about its preference, articulated in the mastery stories. In their preparedness—their epistemological attitude—to engage responsively with the world, the masters understand the risks involved. Therefore, they thoughtfully and conscientiously build their capacities to be spontaneous. The Zhuangzian life characterized by spontaneity is richer and more engaged; it is perhaps more risky, but also potentially more fulfilling.

Notes

1. For a collection of essays on the skill stories, refer to Lai and Chiu (2019). I highlight the term "skill" as there is some doubt—notably expressed by Eric Schwitzgebel—concerning whether the *Zhuangzi* emphasizes, not to mention advocates, skill. Schwitzgebel proposes that the *Zhuangzi* "does not especially value spontaneous, skilful responsiveness" (2019: 101). This view runs contrary to a view widely shared by scholars, as noted in Schwitzgebel's discussion. This discussion does not engage with Schwitzgebel's views on skill; it assumes the majority position, that the text is interested in questions about skill. While cognizant of Schwitzgebel's argument, I note that his study takes only the "Inner Chapters" (the first seven chapters of the 33-chapter extant text) as expressing the "core" views of the *Zhuangzi* (107n2). He also agrees that skill is viewed as being more significant in the other chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. Secondly, I note that, as Schwitzgebel also bundles spontaneity with skill, as noted in the quotation, the reflections here on spontaneity will have implications for how we think about skill in his analysis.

2. If we were to look for terms approximating "spontaneity," the phrase *ziran* (自然) would seem to have the closest fit. However, *ziran* occurs in the *Zhuangzi* in only seven passages (*Zhuangzi* 5/55–60, 7/7-11, 14/13–30, 16/5-11, 17/28–41, 21/24–38, 31/32–40). In most cases, the phrase refers to how events in the world run their course, or how humans should accept this phenomenon. It is perhaps only in a couple of these where the agent's actions are involved (*Zhuangzi* 17/28–41; 21/24–38).

3. References to the *Zhuangzi* text are from the Harvard-Yenching *Zhuangzi Yinde* (Hong 1956), unless otherwise stated.

4. Lisa Raphals highlights the uniqueness of the wheelwright's approach: unlike other craftspersons, who use measuring instruments such as compass and square to guide their work, Bian carves freehand (Raphals 2019). The phrase "compass and square" (*guiju* 規矩) also had a metaphorical meaning, referring to (the imposition of) standards, including for human behavior (135).

p. 257 5. Maspero compares the *Zhuangzi*'s reliance on intuition with the *via purgativa* of Christian thought (Maspero 1978: 308). In this light, Maspero claims, "mystical union" (with *dao* 道) may be facilitated by undertaking regular exercises (including breathing exercises) and meditation to cultivate detachment from external things, so that there are experiences of ecstasy, and the emptying of the soul (308).

6. Graham's discussion of Zhuangzi's antirational stance is embedded in the context of debates between Zhuangzi and his sparring partner, HUI Shi. The latter, whom Graham calls a "rationalist," uses analyticity in drawing distinctions so as to pose paradoxes. Graham argues that HUI Shi's position is untenable (Graham 1981: 9). In another book, entitled *Reason and Spontaneity*, Graham notes that Zhuangzi's antirationalism is a reaction to "both the [Confucian] moralists and the logicians" (1985: 185). Graham locates Zhuangzi's epistemology within the discourse of the time, referring in particular to the disputes between the Confucians and Mohists, each of whom was certain they were correct (*shì* 是) and the other wrong (*fei* 非) (*Zhuangzi* 4/4–6, 2/21-27. See Lai 2006).

7. For example, Chad Hansen in *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* considers the idea of knowledge in Chinese

philosophy (*zhi* 知) stating, "Knowledge is knowledge of *dao*, knowledge of what to do … Zhi^{knowing} is more akin to skill than to information processing. We should understand *zhi*^{know} as know-how or know-to rather than know-that. To *zhi*^{know} dao is to know (how) to perform it properly" (1992: 85–86)." Philip Ivanhoe has also suggested that Zhuangzian knowledge is knowing-how, as we will see in further discussion (1993).

8. Graham's position varies across his work. For example, in spite of his general remarks that "spontaneity" and "rationality" are at odds, he at times introduces more subtlety in his analysis. For instance, he resists a commonplace conception of rationality in the Western tradition as a stance that is detached from nature to study it objectively, placing it at odds with a conception of spontaneity in the Romantic tradition as the free play of impulse and emotion (1983: 12). He then argues that Daoist spontaneity does not subscribe to this dichotomy, and that, instead, it "wants to remain inside nature, to behave spontaneously as an animal, to be caused rather than to choose, and concepts resembling those of stimulus and response come easily to him without the science which for us provides their context; on the other hand, he has a contempt for emotion and subjectivity, a respect for things as they objectively are, as cool and lucid as a as a scientist's" (12–13). In this statement, Graham moves across the terminology, explicitly breaking up different dichotomies that he identifies as belonging to the Western tradition.

9. In a note at this point, Ivanhoe states, "It is not perfectly clear whether Zhuangzi believes that this knowledge is innately fully formed and can be released through a sudden act of insight or whether it arises only in the course of practical experience. The latter would appear to be his primary picture, though he seems to place great store on innate and indelible intuitions" (1993: 648n33).

10. Harold Roth also draws attention to a particular mode of spontaneous and intuitive consciousness distinctive to the skill stories: "Propositional knowing is, in Ryle's words, a "knowing that." Nondual knowing, however, is a "knowing how." Knowing *that* is the knowing of the *weishi* mode of consciousness. Knowing *how* is the knowing of the *yinshi* mode of consciousness and, as we shall see, is linked with the many skill passages in the text that are particularly collected in Chapter 19, "Da sheng" 達生 (Fathoming life)" (2003: 27). Roth distinguishes two types of knowing. *Weishi* 為是 knowledge is driven by the taught and contrived "that's it" while *yinshi* 因是, Zhuangzi's skill-related knowledge, is adaptive (22). Roth highlights the place of mystical knowledge in the *Zhuangzi*. In doing so, he claims that "all forms of propositional knowledge … are true only relative to the standpoint and the circumstance of the knower" (28).

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11. Here, it seems that Confucius has misunderstood the significant difference between skill (*qiao*) and *dao*. The cicada catcher does not answer the first question, concerning his skill, but affirms that he has *dao*. It could suggest that skill is a lower level of achievement than *dao*. The phrase "子巧乎有道邪" may be understood in a number of different ways, depending on (a) how the phrase is divided, and (b) how the character *hu* 乎 is understood. First, the phrase may be understood as comprising two questions, "子巧乎?" and "有道邪?" ("Do you have skill?" and "Do you have [a] *dao*?"). Here, *hu* is a modal particle expressing a question. Secondly, 乎 may function, also as a modal particle, by expressing affirmation or approval, as in "子巧乎! 有道邪?" ("What skill you have! Is there [a] *dao*?")—this is the way the phrase is translated here. A third translation, suggested by Michael Loewe, is to understand the phrase as a single question, "子巧乎有道邪?" In this case, 乎, in the middle of the utterance, functions as a preposition. The single question could be translated as "Is there [a] *dao* in your skill?" This is rather cryptic, though one possible understanding is "Is there *dao* in how you learn, or realize, your skill?" In this case, the question is about *dao qua* method, specifically about whether there is a method to learn the skill and/or to realize it. Confucius's question may be about acquisition, or it could be about performance (or both), and the cicada catcher's response in the passage is consistent with these different possibilities.

12. As described in the *Analects* 6.3/12/4–5.

13. Such absorbed engagement gives an observer the impression that the master is in a trancelike state, forgetting all else that is happening around him (Roth 2003).

14. This is reinforced by his statement that "I do not know how or why I do what I do": if he acts in accord with the *dao* of the raging waters, he cannot at the same time have predetermined objectives (*bu zhi wu suo yi ran er ran* 不知吾所以然而然). This phrase occurs in the final statement of the swimmer, that "I was born on the dry land and felt safe on the dry land—that was what was originally there. I grew up with the water and felt safe in the water—that was what was natural to me. I do not know how or why I do what I do—that's destiny." (adapted from the translation by Watson 1968: 204–5).

15. Similar remarks arise in relation to the idea of "flow," first articulated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990). The flow

experience involves intense absorption and enjoyment in the activity. In such "optimal experience," as opposed to our undertaking routine tasks, a person is able to "focus attention at will" and to "be oblivious to distractions" (31).

16. *Zhuangzi* 17/51–53. See the discussions in Raphals (2022); Lai (2022a: 6–9); Chong (2019); Bruya (2010).

17. *Zhuangzi* 2/27–31; 10/11–23; 7/31–33; 13/53–60; 15/10–14.

18. Albert Galvany discusses the contrastive attitudes of the swimmer and Confucius, highlighting the story's contribution to our understanding of different approaches to moral life (2019).

19. Scott Cook represents Confucian learning in terms of the completed heart-mind. He writes, "The ultimate goal of learning lies in cultivating the ability to respond appropriately to whatever situation one may find oneself in, and to do so not merely because one has an intellectual grasp of what is proper to the situation, but rather because one has completely internalized such a sense of propriety to the point where one oneself is *inclined* to do so…. The key lies not merely in achieving an understanding of the proper forms of ↳ response, but to cultivate the proper attitude out of which the appropriate response comes naturally" (1997: 526–27).

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20. Wai Wai CHIU presents an account of spontaneous actions that incorporate the importance of forgetting (2019: 399–403).

21. Although I agree with Fraser about Chinese philosophy's focus on cultivating reliable responses, I worry that the use of a discrimination-and-response model might still be hemmed within a mind–body dualist framework. The phrase suggests that a "discriminating" mind is first engaged, followed by the actions of a "responding" body. Refer to my discussion in Lai (2022b: 676).

22. Bruya writes, in more theoretical terms, "Collection is a process of engendering internal coherence by exploiting natural internal resources through concentrative practices. Shedding contributes to cognitive-affective unity by diminishing distractions that would threaten the process of collection. Collection and shedding proceed in tandem and supplement each other. Shedding clears a space for collection, and collection fills the space, thereby facilitating shedding" (2010: 216).

23. Bruya also considers questions of agency and selfhood, and his idea of wholeness entails both metaphysical commitments (about the self) as well as epistemological ones. His detailed and meticulous study of spontaneity in the *Zhuangzi* reflects on how it can inform contemporary Western philosophical uses of the term.

24. Admittedly, Graham's account of spontaneity emphasizes a person's awareness in their encounters. The dictum "be aware" is the driving force of his later account of spontaneity (1985: esp. 14–29). Joel Kupperman (1996) provides a philosophically rich discussion of the scope of Daoist spontaneity in light of emotions and desire.

25. An influential version of embodiment is that offered by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch in their book, *The Embodied Mind*. Their proposal draws from Buddhist philosophy of mind and action.

26. For a more detailed account of the cicada catcher's embodiment, refer to Lai (2019).

27. Eric Schwitzgebel has suggested that one of the themes in the *Zhuangzi* is to take language less seriously (1996). Interestingly, Confucius in the *Analects* is sometimes wary of words, though his concerns are about craftiness and insincerity masked by them (e.g., *Analects* 1.3, 4.22) rather than their ineffectiveness in conveying teachings.

28. For GUO Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, refer to Guo (1983). Brook Ziporyn presents a detailed analysis of the idea of traces in GUO Xiang's thought. See especially Ziporyn (2003: 31–61).

29. I thank Justin Tiwald for pointing out this connection.

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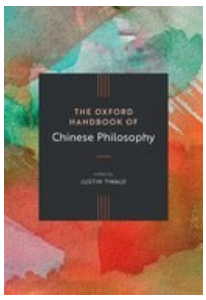

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CHAPTER

13 Dependence and Autonomy in Early Confucianism

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Abstract

This chapter places master–student relations in the context of early Confucian social theory, which includes a theory of different interdependent roles and relationships, as well as a related account of personal development and individual and communal flourishing. It examines the question of autonomy within these relationships, looking closely at remonstration, obedience, and disobedience. For early Confucian thinkers, dependence on one's parents and then a teacher is precisely the way to cultivate virtuous mastery of life, a path to autonomy but not independence. This chapter focuses in particular on accounts of dependence in early Rú texts. This focus is part of a larger effort to explore how their valorization of certain forms of mutual dependence might instruct contemporary thinkers interested in articulating a reasonable, sociologically, and psychologically believable conception of personal autonomy.

Keywords: Confucianism, dependence, autonomy, relationships, obedience, virtue
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
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I. Introduction

I have argued elsewhere that early Rú 儒or "Confucians" viewed human virtue as the most general form of mastery of the arts of living (Stalnaker 2020). These ideas structured their conceptions of human relationships and politics because of their conviction that virtuous mastery must be consciously cultivated in individuals through sustained training and practice, within ongoing hierarchical relationships of mutual care and responsibility.[1]

In this chapter I focus in particular on accounts of dependence in early Rú texts, as part of a larger project that explores how their valorization of certain forms of mutual dependence might instruct contemporary thinkers interested in articulating a reasonable, sociologically and psychologically believable conception of personal autonomy. Early Rú texts note and analyze several important modes of dependence, including that of children on parents, of students or disciples on teachers or masters, of ministers and

counselors on their economic benefactors and political rulers, and of the common people on political elites (and vice versa). While dependence is not an important indigenous Chinese theoretical category, it serves well to integrate aspects of early Rú teaching on key virtues such as trustworthiness, reverence, filiality, and benevolence; on processes of teaching and learning; on friendship and the rest of the "five relationships"; and on the ritualized relations between those with high political or socioeconomic status on the one hand, and those with real virtuous mastery (*dé* 德) on the other. Furthermore, the early Rú insist on the centrality of the unchosen
p. 266 child–parent ↳ relation as the paradigm of healthy, salutary dependence across people's life spans. As analysts we must understand this if we are to grasp the character of the ethical life they advocate, and to distinguish it clearly from contemporary Western views that make freedom of choice and a right to exit essential to good, nondominating human relationships.

In the broadest terms, early Rú thinkers like Mèngzi and Xúnzi distinguish personal independence, which, as I will show, they approve of in only limited respects, from virtue and moral integrity, which are crucial goals of Confucian personal formation, however conceived. Early Rú think that dependence on other people is good and natural across the human life span. I suggest that the various sorts of dependence they recognize can be distinguished into two types: the general, ongoing social interdependence necessitated by human needs and organized by our various role relations, and the special case of dependence of students on teachers as they develop their character and personal integrity. (Intriguingly, early thinkers do not list the teacher–student relationship as one of the celebrated "five relationships" but see it as having some similarities to both parent–child and friend–friend relations.) These two types of dependence are deeply intertwined, however, given the crucial role of families in the Rú vision, both as the beginning of virtue and as a crucial component of a flourishing life. For these thinkers, dependence on one's parents and then a teacher is precisely the way to cultivate virtuous mastery of life.

To avoid misunderstanding, let me say a bit more about autonomy and why I take it to be a useful concept for interpreting and analyzing certain aspects of early Confucian thought. Autonomy is a complex and in certain respects ambiguous notion, with a convoluted history.[2] Autonomy in its most basic sense refers to the capacity for self-government and thus has core meanings that refer to the human capacity for agency, self-control, and acting on the basis of one's own motives or reasons (rather than animal inclination, in some versions). It thus draws on the long Western debate over the character of the human will, and in particular its freedom.[3] But this more agent-centered perspective is supplemented by a more social conception or aspect of autonomy, which concerns freedom from external constraint or control, so that someone may act according to his or her own judgment insofar as that is possible in a given set of circumstances, rather than being compelled by manipulative external forces in some way, leaving aside constraint by physical laws like gravity. Individual autonomy as a political value is central to liberal and democratic political theory and to the full range of social contract theories of politics.[4] As I hope to show, the early Rú are quite concerned with the cultivation of personal autonomy in the sense of developing wise judgment, self-control, and good, virtuous character, but cash this out socially in ways that differ rather strikingly from the liberalism of J. S. Mill or John Rawls, for example. In particular, there is an ironic twist to their views: the way to cultivate mastery of oneself is precisely through thoughtful and attentive submission to one's parents, older siblings, teachers, and in some cases political rulers, and the point of politics is to facilitate the cultivation of human agency insofar as that contributes to social flourishing.

p. 267 II. Varieties of Dependence

"Confucianism" refers to the tradition of thought and practice of the Rú and extends from the early Western Zhou dynasty (ca. 1045–771 BCE) hundreds of years before Confucius up to the present day. Naturally, many developments and changes occurred over this vast span of time. In the present chapter I focus on the "classical" or relatively early stage of the Rú tradition, drawing on texts known as the *Lúnyǔ* or *Analects* (supposedly a record of Kǒngzi/Confucius's remarks and actions recorded by his disciples), the *Mèngzi*, and the *Xúnzi*, as well as other Rú texts from the Warring States (480–221 BCE) and Han (202 BCE–220 CE) eras.

To get a sense of the range and complexity of views within the early tradition, consider the following two familiar examples, one from *Mèngzi* and another from the *Analects*. Both express views about when one should think for oneself and when one should defer to another's judgment, either on matters of opinion, or on questions of action. Their answers are not general and universal but vary depending on a number of factors. Mèngzi argues in 3B2 that a pair of high ministers in the state of Qín were spineless despite their power and thus cannot be classed as "great men." He argues,

> To take obedience as one's standard of correctness is the way of wives and concubines. [By contrast,] to dwell in the broadest place on earth; to stand in one's proper place in the world; to put into effect the great Way of the world; to follow it with the people when one obtains one's aim; to practice it by oneself when one does not attain one's aim; wealth and prestige are incapable of seducing him; poverty and low status are incapable of moving him; awe and military might cannot bend him—it is this that is called being a great man (3B2).[5]

Despite the baldly sexist framing,[6] this is a paean to what might be called Confucian autonomy: standing firm according to the dictates of one's own conscience, rather than obediently deferring to one's social superiors; seeking to take one's appropriate place of moral leadership in one's community, whatever that might turn out to be, but remaining steadfast even in adversity. In contrast to the two flattering courtiers who prompted this outburst, Mèngzi lauds the "great man" who is willing to remonstrate with his lord even when his livelihood will be endangered, and who is not cowed by either military might or high social position, nor willing to compromise his righteousness for the sake of economic gain. This attitude forms a core part of the "Way" of life and government that Mèngzi recommends so strongly.[7]

Compare that relatively "independent" stance with Kǒngzi's familiar counsel to his disciples regarding their parents. In *Analects* 4.18, Kǒngzi is recorded as saying "In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, if you see they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be even more respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently, without
p. 268 resentment." Here independence of mind is valuable but not preeminent; instead, filial children should remonstrate gently ↳ first but then respectfully go along with their parents' wishes even when they think their parents are wrong.

These two quotations only scratch the surface of the textual evidence relevant to these questions, but I hope that the juxtaposition of these two passages will suggest that there is a wide range of attitudes toward superiors recommended in early Rú texts: the esteem given to remonstration in various contexts suggests that Confucians do value cultivating and exercising what Justin Tiwald has called "deliberative autonomy" (that is, making up one's own mind about what is right).[8] But they think one's own judgment in this sense is decisive (i.e., should lead directly to action) only sometimes, for some people, in some situations. When we should obey a superior's commands, and when we should disobey, seems to vary depending especially on the sorts of dependent relationships involved. More specifically, early Rú generally commend obedience to parents as a more central part of the virtue of *xiào* 孝, "filial piety," especially for adults, when compared with the relatively lesser value of obedience in minister–ruler relations, which should be ordered by practicing the virtue of *zhōng* 忠, commonly translated as "loyalty" but often meaning something more like "doing one's utmost." I will fill out and in some ways complicate this picture, especially with regard to Xúnzi's differences from this consensus.

To see the thread connecting these various issues, we should examine early Confucian social theory and chart the variations between different models of dependent relationships. While the early Rú had serious disagreements among themselves on some issues, they largely shared a vision of the truly good society as harmonious and integrated, yet internally differentiated and hierarchically ordered, and led by wise and benevolent rulers and ministers who care for the common people as if caring for their own children. While I will not argue for it here, I think there is ample evidence for this sort of vision in the *Analects*, the *Mèngzi*, and the *Xúnzi*, not to mention other early texts.[9] I will, however, draw out some of the key justifications for this sort of vision, as a way to demonstrate the logic governing it, which helps to explain what sorts of dependence are good, and why, from early Confucian points of view.

The root explanation for the Rú social vision seems to be that every person has both needs and talents, but that we can only meet our needs satisfactorily through social cooperation. As Mèngzi suggests in 2B10, "When the ancients had markets, they were for exchanging what they had for what they lacked." We each have many needs but will exhaust ourselves if we try to do everything by ourselves, as Mèngzi argues against a representative of the peasant activist Xǔ Xíng in 3A4. The only way to satisfy our needs is through peaceful, orderly exchange of goods and services, with many specializing in farming (to produce the food everyone needs), others in craft production (to make the implements others need to live), others in business (to distribute goods widely, to the benefit of all), and still others in government (to oversee and rightly order the whole society; 3A4).

In 3A4 Mèngzi also argues starkly that "things are inherently unequal," and the context shows clearly that he means unequal in value. Many shoes are "common," worth relatively little, but some shoes are fine or even exquisite—some exceptional shoes are
p. 269 worth 10,000 times more than others (3A4). Human beings too have dramatic differences ↳ between them, it would appear, in Mèngzi's view, despite their many similarities and their shared "nature" (*xìng* 性). These differences are partly a matter of variations

in "talent" (*cái* 才), but largely a result of "worthiness" (*xián* 賢) cultivated and achieved through Confucian study and practice, as well as steadily attending to the good intuitions and impulses coming from one's "genuine heart" (e.g., 4B7, 6A6–9). Vast differences in human capability arise, on Mèngzi's account, based on a nested set of factors: first, whether people have their basic physical needs such as food, shelter, and clothing met; second, whether they have received instruction about human roles and relationships, and the moral obligations that structure them; third, depending on what sorts of activities they pursue ("great" like statecraft, or "small" like farming) (all 3A4); and fourth, the degree to which they pursue serious Confucian self-cultivation (6A6–9). At any one of these levels, on a Mèngzian account, people's natural tendencies to grow into moral virtue can become disrupted and in some extreme cases even destroyed.

Mèngzi and other early Rú combine these thoughts to yield a social vision where all people rely on each other to satisfy our shared needs, according to each of our capabilities, talents, and work. As Mèngzi argues, "Those who achieve the mean care for those who do not achieve the mean. Those who have talent nurture those who do not have talent" (4B7; see also 3A3). Perhaps more to the point, "Some labor with their hearts; some labor with their strength. Those who labor with their hearts rule others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others feed others; those who govern others are fed by others" (3A4). In other words, many labor physically in order to provide for their own and others' basic physical needs, in this sort of vision. But those who have the most talent, and are able to achieve "the mean," in other words, choose wisely what course of action to take in a variety of situations, will labor with their hearts and minds to govern the whole community.

Early Rú texts frequently liken benevolent Confucian government to parental care for one's own children; this theme occurs throughout the early corpus, for example, in the *Documents*, *Odes*, *Mèngzi*, and *Xúnzi*, and is ubiquitous in Han sources.[10] When wise leaders govern benevolently, our productive capacities overflow our needs, and thus humans live in a state of abundance. When society is this well ordered, we can satisfy our deep, truly good desires (Mèngzi), or satisfy our appropriately refined and cultivated desires (Xúnzi). Xúnzi is the most explicit on these points, developing a whole anti-Mohist political economy that celebrates ample wealth and the civilization and security it makes possible when justly distributed (e.g., *Xúnzi*, Chapter 10).[11]

Good, "kingly" government aims to "assist" the people by protecting the weak and vulnerable, not oppressing the reasonably capable and strong, and providing at least basic moral education to everyone, which outlines differential roles and responsibilities for each person (3A4). As Mèngzi argues, the sage-king should "work them [i.e., the people], draw them, straighten them, rectify them, help them, make them practice, assist them [or, on another reading, "give them wings"], make them get it themselves, and thus benefit them" (3A4). There is no other way to describe this: early Confucians have a thoroughly paternalistic social vision. And yet, the end goal is not primarily to make people docile and obedient but, rather, to "make them get it themselves." The ideal ↳ is clearly for all people to achieve a suitable positive moral capability, a realization of their potential as agents—what Isaiah Berlin has called "positive liberty."[12] In Rú terms, everyone can develop at least some degree of virtue (*dé* 德), whether they are in high positions or low. And the good social effects of these developments are clear: when well governed, the common people will "assist each other," watch out for each other, and even be "affectionate" toward each other (3A3).[13]

Admittedly these achievements are to be calibrated to people's particular stations in life, and so for Mèngzi the vast majority of people would develop agency that had a relatively limited scope for decision-making: farming, raising families, and household industry. Their virtue is supposedly responsive to superiors' leadership as grass bending before the wind (*Analects* 2.1, 12.19, *Mèngzi* 2A3, 3A2). But Mèngzi clearly thinks every person has morally significant choices to make in their daily life, and their character will either flower or wither depending on whether they heed their moral intuitions and inclinations, or ignore and "drown" them (e.g., *Mèngzi* 3A4, 3B9, 4A11, 4B33).[14]

Some degree of virtue, then, is possible for every person, but people cultivate virtue precisely through and within hierarchical relationships of mutual responsibility and care. In many respects the paradigm relationship for early Confucians is the father–son relationship, which we might read as the parent–child relationship even while noting the patriarchy intrinsic to the early Rú vision (e.g., *Mèngzi* 3B2 quoted earlier). The received *Analects* is famously fond of *xiào*, filial piety, as the "root" from which *rén* 仁 ("humaneness" or "goodness") grows, and as a crucial virtue in its own right (*Analects* 1.2; see also 1.6, etc.). By deferring to and serving others who know more than us and whom we can trust to care for us benevolently, we gradually grasp how to live in harmony with others—how to "take our place" among them. Modeling oneself on the behavior of exemplars such as Yáo 堯 and Shùn 舜seems to be an analogous but later phase of moral development, after one has already learned the rudiments of good

behavior by serving one's father and mother (*Mèngzi* 4A2). And we continue to cultivate virtue as adults both by caring for inferiors, such as children and subordinates, and by serving those in authority over us, as ministers "extend themselves to the utmost" in serving their lord (*Analects* 1.7). In most cases, we depend on those "above" us for guidance and rely on those "below" us for service and support.[15]

With this survey in mind, let us step back and try to take stock of the varieties of early Confucian dependence, charting what unites and distinguishes them. Dependence on a Confucian account clearly does not imply domination, or thoughtless subservience. Early Rú advocate remonstration by those in inferior roles when their superiors are about to choose something that appears to be wrong. Sometimes disobedience to direct orders is exactly what a situation calls for, as Xúnzi argues in his remarkable account of loyalty as doing what is right and necessary to benefit one's state, even if one must contravene direct orders from one's lord (*Xúnzi* 13.2). Nevertheless, as the quote from Kǒngzi illustrates, in some cases it is best to simply cease remonstration even when serious mistakes are about to be made—the paradigm case for this being when an adult child remonstrates with an elderly parent.

p. 271 Exactly how to understand early Rú views of proper obedience to supposed superiors is a complex question, but to generalize, it appears that Mèngzi, Xúnzi, and the Confucius of the *Analects* think straightforward obedience is a virtue of learners, beginners, and children (as well as women and the common people; e.g., *Mèngzi* 3B2, *Xúnzi* 11.9a), but they begin to diverge over when, without resentment, one should submit to mistaken superiors, and when one should actively overrule them and pursue what seems best according to one's own judgment. All three treat parent–child relationships differently from extrafamilial relationships like lord–minister relations, agreeing that disobedience is much more commonly justified outside the family. Notably, Xúnzi differs from the others on this point, telling readers not only to "follow the Way, do not follow one's lord" (*Xúnzi* 13.2, 29.1), which seems to encapsulate widespread Confucian convictions about righteous public service. But Xúnzi also counsels sons to "follow what is right, do not follow one's father" (29.1), which is rather different from the *Analects* passage quoted earlier advocating peaceful submission to one's parents.[16]

These varying accounts of remonstration, obedience, and disobedience track a distinction between deliberative and practical autonomy. Remonstrating with parents and teachers is an excellent way to cultivate deliberative autonomy, the ability to attend to particulars and think for oneself about what ought to be done in various situations. But Confucius and Mèngzi in particular appear to reserve practical autonomy, the ability to actually decide and act on one's own best judgment, for a much smaller sliver of the population, in only certain circumstances—in essence, for those who are well trained and dependably virtuous Confucians, facing situations where typical ritual rules need to be suspended, or dutiful service requires disobeying orders.

This bald contrast is actually a bit too simple. Anyone, even a child, who fulfills the requirements of a role, however seemingly rule governed, clear, and obvious, is exercising some degree of practical autonomy. How exactly to follow a rule in a given context and situation, with the innumerable variations in circumstances and slight setbacks or peculiarities that crop up in daily life, is never as precise as a computer running an algorithm, with no room for judgments.[17] Although I have found no textual evidence from early China to support such a theory, it would seem that attempting to follow rules and fulfill duties of various sorts would be excellent training for learners in the art of practical autonomy. Over time students could attempt to fulfill more abstract and/or demanding dicta, such as pursuing benevolent or other kinds of virtuous action in diverse circumstances, based on their increasingly sure grasp of basic requirements. In fact, as Michael Ing and others have discussed, there is a developed commentarial discourse in later Confucian sources regarding the relation between *jīng* 經, what is "normal," "standard," and generally correct, and *quán* 權, often translated as "discretion" but literally meaning "to weigh" in a scale, which here refers to "weighing" different factors in difficult cases that require judgment of competing or unusual particulars.[18] (One locus classicus for these ideas is *Mèngzi* 4A17.)

These varying counsels to submission or disobedience also flag the relative value of certain relationships, with family being
p. 272 irreplaceable and paramount. Irritating or criticizing one's parents leads to resentment and even enmity between family members,
↳ which appears to be deeply distressing to figures like Mèngzi in particular (4A18; see passage later in this chapter). Mèngzi makes it clear, in his imagined narrative of how the sage-king Shùn would eagerly cast aside his imperial rule to protect his father from just punishment, that he thinks we have profound desires to be in harmonious, loving relation with our close kin, and that we must not endanger these emotional wellsprings of our virtue by thwarting such desires (7A35; see also 4A28).

We might note that parent–child relationships are not chosen, but given, and are in an important sense irreplaceable. We are stuck with our parents, and our children, and cannot exchange them. Instead, we learn to live with them by caring for them, and continuing to reframe the relationship over time as both parties change, growing and declining. Sometimes, as with Shùn, this is excruciating and nearly fatal, but it is still apparently a relationship worth struggling to sustain, especially from a Mèngzian point of view. Shùn's father and brother both tried to kill him, apparently in order to usurp his privileges as emperor, but through steadfast and patient filial care Shùn managed to win at least his father over in the end (*Mèngzi* 5A1–4, 4A28). While this example seems willfully extreme in Mèngzi's telling, it does point to the degree of self-sacrifice and emotional suffering that may be necessary to arrive at a harmonious and loving relationship with one's closest family members (on Shun's ability to "put himself aside and join with others," see 2A8). Whatever this is, it is not a starry-eyed idealization of family life but, rather, an assertion of familial intimacy's crucial role in human flourishing. And Xúnzi clearly thinks that parent–child relationships are not endangered by principled disagreements over what is right, particularly when adult children must care for aging parents (*Xúnzi* 29.1).

By contrast to familial relationships, some other notable relationships, such as lord–minister, are quite changeable. There is much discussion in early Rú texts about when to take office, when to resign, and even when to flee a state about to collapse because of an incompetent ruler one has been attempting to serve (e.g., *Mèngzi* 5A9). And judging from the historical sources remaining to us, turbulent change of personnel at the highest levels of government was typical of the Warring States period.[19]

There is thus a crucial difference between familial relationships, which for the early Confucians are essentially unending and imposed on individuals, and political or professional relationships, which can be terminated and are the result of choices, often of both superior and inferior parties. But this contrast is easy to overstate. Both sorts of relationship are obviously constituted by those who form its parts, and the quality of the relationship is dramatically affected by the conduct, thoughts, and feelings of the participants. Both familial and political relationships are structured by a variety of particular ritual requirements and directed obligations, which bind both the superior and inferior parties to each other.

LU Xiufen has argued that early Confucian familial relationships were profoundly shaped by an array of role-specific obligations and ritual requirements and were in all cases hierarchical. He contrasts these relationships with Confucian accounts of friendship, which was much less rigorously structured and seemed to lack any special ritual requirements not deriving from other social statuses or
 roles. Friendships are personally ↳ chosen, according to Lu's reading, and reflect a search for mutual recognition, understanding, and support for self-cultivation.[20] We can see now that Lu's insightful contrast can be extended to include a third category, political relationships, which seem to be defined by an array of role-specific obligations and ritual requirements and yet require recognition, understanding, and choice to fulfill.

We are thus faced with a continuum of dependence relations in early Confucian social thought. Familial relations are essentially eternal, once started, and are structured according to highly articulated systems of role-specific obligations and ritual requirements that stretch on well past the death of individuals.[21] Relations outside the family are in most cases structured by role-specific obligations and ritual expectations, although these are sometimes indexed instead to features of persons such as age, sex, or degree of virtue.[22] But these nonfamilial relationships are much more subject to personal choice regarding when to begin and end them, and how to conduct them. Other relations, most notably friendship, seem to slip between the cracks of the system of Confucian social roles, in the sense that they have the least explicit requirements, both in terms of obligatory actions or service, and ritual interaction.[23]

As part of their overarching social vision, early Confucians thus appear to argue that mutual dependence not only meets everyone's needs well; it also cultivates virtuous and wise judgment in those who must direct and lead society. Early Confucians want to balance the social goods of harmony, respect, and love that are protected by dutiful service to superiors and benevolent paternal treatment of inferiors, with the goods of justice, efficient wealth creation, and refined aesthetic delight that come only from cultivating virtuous mastery in elites through teacher–student relations.

III. Teachers and Students

In order to fill out this sketch of Confucian views of dependence, I want to examine the ambivalence in early Confucian sources about how to understand the teacher–student relationship, which is not classed explicitly as one of the five relationships. Should it be seen as analogous to the father–son relation, or instead as something different, perhaps something more like friendship, with different rules, practices, and expectations? This ambivalence seems to mirror their larger difficulties with remonstrance and disobedience and might help us to see how closely aligned parental care and training are to adult education and self-cultivation under a Confucian master.

On the one hand, some sources seem to represent masters and teachers as surrogate fathers, and disciples as surrogate sons. This certainly seems to be the case in the *Analects*, where the disciples apparently live and travel with Kǒngzi, many for years, and only leave him to take up government posts. Kǒngzi repeatedly addresses his disciples as *xiǎozǐ* 小子, "youngsters" or "younger sons," which at the least has a familial, paternal air (*Analects* 5.22, 8.3, 11.17, 17.9, 17.19; note also 19.12, 20.1). And when Kǒngzi dies,
p. 274 as Mèngzi tells the story, the disciples mourn him for three years, as they would have for ↳ their parents, and only then return home. Zǐgòng then decides to mourn for another three-year period, living in a hut on the burial grounds, and only then returns home (*Mèngzi* 3A4). And Mèngzi scolds people for leaving the service of their Confucian master and records Zēngzi as doing the same in his day (3A4), which suggests he viewed the relationship as permanent, or at least long-lasting, and thus analogous to a familial bond.

On the other hand, Mèngzi in particular takes pains to distinguish parent–child relationships, which should be marked by loving closeness (*qīn* 親), from friendships and teaching relationships, in which it is appropriate to "demand goodness" from each other in a way that would be emotionally damaging to a family relationship (4A18, 4B30). Explaining why 君子 *jūnzǐ* or noble men teach *each other's* sons, Mèngzi argues,

> In order to instruct, you must correct what someone does. If the correction does not work, one must follow it up with reprimands. If one follows it up with reprimands, then it will hurt the feelings of the son, who will say, "My father instructs me by correcting me. But my father is not always correct himself." Then father and son will hurt each other's feelings. For fathers and sons to hurt each other is terrible…. There is nothing more inauspicious than for them to become estranged. (4A18)

This passage is intriguing because of its insistence on the necessity of warm affection between fathers and sons, and also on the necessity of correction, even rebuke, by teachers of their charges. If perfect behavior is truly required from teachers to avoid creating resentment in their students, then teachers should hold themselves to a very high standard indeed. Or perhaps imperfect behavior is inevitable, and so one's angry resentment is better directed toward one's demanding teachers, rather than one's beloved parents.

Despite this passage, the representations of teacher–student relations in the *Mèngzi*, the *Xúnzi*, and to some extent the *Analects* do not depict angry criticism, but instead respectful and serious (and sometimes even aggressive) questioning about the reasoning behind masters' authoritative judgments. For example, in Book 5 Mèngzi's disciple WÀN Zhāng questions him vigorously about the rationale behind the sage-king Shùn's behavior toward his vicious family, and about appropriate relations with one's economic patrons, occasionally expressing bafflement and pressing Mèngzi for better explanations (e.g., 5B4). And in the "Debating Warfare" chapter of the *Xúnzi*, Xúnzi's students CHÉN Xiāo and LǏ Sī press him vigorously to explain how he can possibly claim that just war fighting is in any sense "benevolent" and "righteous" (*Xúnzi* c. 15). This repeated pattern of disciples asking for explanations suggests that the instruction given by these Confucian masters, at least, was premised on the idea that thoughtful encounters with numerous concrete situations and historical actors would help students arrive at a deeper understanding of the Way, which would help them become "worthy" and "achieve the mean" as they "weighed" different possibilities for action (*Mèngzi* 4A17).

Comparing treatments of father–son and teacher–student relations in early Confucian texts involves both historical and philosophical
p. 275 issues. Historically speaking, it appears that both types of relations were marked by elaborate ritual rules covering ↳ how the inferior partners were supposed to serve their superiors, including guidelines on how to serve them food, clean up after them, and arrange their clothing and sleeping quarters.[24] This would suggest that there were widespread expectations about the appropriate

behavior of subordinates serving their superiors in a variety of relationships, regardless of exactly how these were fulfilled in practice.

Philosophically, one might wonder how to relate the intellectual give and take that in some important respects approximates contemporary academic practices of teaching and learning, to the more alien ideals about inferiors providing daily household service to their teachers and parents. Different texts provide a range of rationales for these practices, and some simply seem to presume them without arguing for them.

Xúnzi has a generalized account of ritual as ethically formative that applies just as well to these basic patterns of household service of superiors. According to Xúnzi, ritual practice gradually reshapes our dispositions and the emotions and desires that spring from them, until after long practice new tendencies to think and feel have "accumulated" and our dispositions are in effect "transformed," so that we not only choose to do the right thing; we want to choose it. Learning to restrain or augment our innate desires and cultivate new, more respectful and benevolent habits gradually changes us just as a steam press permanently straightens crooked wood, Xúnzi thinks.[25]

The "Greater Learning" chapter of the *Lǐjì* or *Ritual Records* also focuses on the crucial importance of personal virtue cultivation in and through hierarchical relationships but highlights other mechanisms than Xúnzi.[26] This text stresses the charismatic power of true virtue to inspire people naturally via our spontaneous emotional reactions. It also highlights the value of empathetic insight into others, as well as personal experience of both subordination and superiority, to guide one to greater, genuinely "sincere" virtue. The text is brief, but it makes clear that one can only lead others when one has "been watchful over oneself when alone" and that only when one has personally gained some kind of excellence or purged a fault from oneself will one be capable of instructing, leading, or correcting others on similar matters (*Lǐjì* 67.6, 9). Only by serving as a subordinate will one see and understand the difference between arrogant, overbearing domination, on the one hand, and truly wise and benevolent leadership, on the other. And similarly, only by serving as a superior will one grasp the sorts of subordinate behavior that one should cultivate or avoid. In either case, personal experience with both good and bad behavior in others provides a trustworthy guide for one's own cultivation and conduct (67.10; also 67.4). The virtues one cultivates at home with one's family provide the base for any sort of wider leadership a noble man might be called to provide. The text asserts,

> The man of noble character accomplishes the moral instruction of his entire country without so much as stepping out of his own house. For filial respect provides the basis for serving one's sovereign; brotherly devotion provides the basis for serving one's superiors; and parental love provides the basis for commanding all of one's subordinates. (67.9)

Here the virtues of both children and parents guide all of us when we act in the broader world beyond the family. And we cultivate these virtues naturally when presented with good "role models" in the family, whom we love and look up to as naturally as we enjoy smelling good odors (67.8). Serving good parents and good teachers, then, naturally helps us cultivate ourselves, according to the "Greater Learning."

The *Ritual Records* is obviously a large and multifaceted text. Two other noteworthy strands are visible in the chapters entitled "Essentials of Ritual" (*Quli* 曲禮) and "Records of Study" (*Xueji* 學記). The first chapter discusses the paramount value of reciprocity in the practice of ritual, so that both superiors and subordinates are cared for and respected. The text likens ritual to gift exchange, with both giving and receiving, and says "propriety is seen as humbling oneself and giving honor to others." If this humbling were all in one direction only, it would be as unsatisfactory as giving gifts but never receiving any (*Lǐjì* 1.1). This echoes the strand of Mèngzi focusing on the exchange discussed earlier, but with the added idea that people will become arrogant or cowardly if they do not participate regularly in reciprocal ritual interactions.

The "Records of Study" is directly relevant to the question of how to understand masters and disciples. The text asserts that learning leads to examining oneself and knowing one's deficiencies, and teaching leads to understanding the difficulties of learning. "Hence it is said, 'Teaching and learning help each other;' … [and] 'Teaching is the half of learning' " (18.3).[27] Here we have a positive counterpart to the "Greater Learning's" emphasis on serving in multiple roles applied directly to the core project of ethical formation. The "Record of Learning" suggests that serving as both student and teacher contributes to the process of ethical development, although these insights are not well developed.

Even if we distinguish different sorts of dependence within an early Confucian social vision, and different, perhaps overlapping rationales for hierarchical relations of care and service, these relationships all nevertheless seem to be premised on human needs, and human potential, both individual and social. Some, because of meritorious achievements, should be entrusted with greater authority, if the Way is to prevail more broadly throughout society. But everyone needs others' help, guidance, and service to live decent and fulfilling lives. This leads to perhaps the most striking aspect of the treatment of dependence in early Confucian ethics: the early Rú think moral integrity is tremendously important, indeed central to human flourishing for everyone, given the crucial role of the "ethical vanguard" of good Confucian leaders needed to govern society well.[28] But they separate moral integrity from personal independence and argue that even the healthiest, strongest, and most developed human beings should be socially enmeshed and encumbered across their full life spans—both for their good and for the good of others.

The teacher/student relationship seems to occupy a transitional or liminal position between familial and political relationships that have more precise role obligations and ritual requirements; indeed, we should see it as pivotal. In teaching relationships, dependence on the master's judgment provides the path toward developing mastery oneself, so that one can intelligently decide how and when to
p. 277 remonstrate, obey, and disobey ↳ superiors, and properly guide and care for inferiors. With one's teacher one leaves behind the precisely delineated obligations and ritual proprieties of the family web and relies on a guide along what is both *the* human path per se, and the path to professional success (which later texts will insist redound to the honor of one's family as well).

Mastery of the various excellences such as benevolence, ritual propriety, righteousness, wisdom, and trustworthiness is a lifelong task, and when early Confucians such as Xúnzi explicitly analyze the "stages on life's way," they chart them according to whether one needs continued guidance to attain the mean in one's actions and judgments, or whether one can be relied on even without guidance, in difficult situations.[29] Ideally, then, on an early Confucian account, only long apprenticeship in judgment will prepare one for the challenges of responsible leadership.

Notes

1. **The word in classical Chinese ordinarily translated as "virtue" is *dé* 德. Revealingly, this word is sometimes rendered as "inner power" and may also be glossed as charisma or moral leadership. A full discussion of the subtle similarities and differences between "virtue," *dé*, and their Greek and Roman/Latin analogs (*arete* and *virtus*) is beyond the scope of this chapter. Important discussions of the applicability of virtue and virtue ethics as interpretive aids for understanding early Chinese thought include Van Norden (2007) and Angle and Slote (2013). Note also Yearley (1990), Yu (2007), and Sim (2007). For a recent argument against this trend, see Ames and Rosemont (2011).**
2. **For one account of this history, culminating in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, see Schneewind (1998).**
3. **For a succinct overview of literature related to this aspect of the idea, see Buss (2014).**
4. **For a similarly good, pithy overview of this conception and the associated philosophical literature, see Christman (2011).**
5. **All translations from Chinese are my own. I use the standard ways of referring to passages in the *Lúnyǔ* (*Analects*) and *Mèngzi* and use the section numbers within chapters from Knoblock's translation (1988–1994) of *Xúnzi*, which may be easily keyed to passages in Hutton's superior translation (2014).**
6. **For further discussion of this passage in relation to early Confucian commitments to patriarchy and gender complementarity, and how contemporary interpreters might engage such material, see Stalnaker (2020: 67–73).**
7. **The word "way" translates the Chinese *daò* 道. This word literally refers to a "way" or "path" and by extension comes to mean a way to perform some practice, or to live one's life, or even "the way the world is." For early Rú, the *daò* refers to the way of life and government they discern in the ancient practices of the virtuous Zhōu kings and other sages, which they agree should be put into practice again to bring order to the chaotic conditions of the Warring States period.**
8. **See Tiwald (2012). He introduces "deliberative autonomy" on page 277 and discusses it throughout thereafter.**

9. For more discussion, see Stalnaker (2020): 183–94).

10. See, for example, 尚書, 周書, 泰誓上 (the first part of the "Great Declaration" in the "Documents of Zhou" within the
p. 278 *Documents*; Waltham 1971: 113); 詩經, "南山有臺" and ↳ "泂酌" (two poems from the *Odes*; Waley 1996: 145–46, 254); *Mèngzi* 1A4, 1B7, etc.; *Xúnzi* 9.15, 11.12, etc.

11. The Mohists were another set of groups, often critical of Confucians, inspired to some degree by the teachings of one Master Mò, 墨子 Mòzi. The texts bearing his name recommend impartial caring for all people, elevating the worthy, conforming to one's superior, seeking what is objectively beneficial, getting rid of music (because of its wastefulness), and moderation in funerals, among other positions.

12. Berlin (1998) outlines his widely discussed distinction between negative and positive liberty.

13. El Amine (2015) argues that the early Confucians do not actually aim to cultivate true virtue in the common people but instead only habits of orderliness, which help support an orderly polity. The strength of this interpretation is its claim that the early Confucians were reasonably realistic about politics. I present my own view of these questions in Stalnaker (2020: 230–42). However, note the evidence, especially in the *Mèngzǐ*, which suggests that Mèngzǐ thinks government should assist commoners as they develop at least rudimentary forms of certain key virtues, such as benevolence, ritual propriety, and filial piety. And in general, "habits of orderliness" seem hard to distinguish from the beginnings of virtue, albeit far from its full flower; the point is simply that Rú aspirations for perfecting the virtue of peasants were often limited.

14. Both Mèngzi and Xúnzi argue that all human beings have at least the moral and intellectual potential to become sages (*Mèngzi* 6B2; *Xúnzi* 23/116/6–23), but the vast majority do not achieve this state. Both clearly think only a small number of people will become truly cultivated and thus fit to serve in government. They also think that Confucian practices are essential for the cultivation of good character and virtuous skill at administration.

15. As I will discuss, Xúnzi's account of filial piety diverges in interesting ways from the views of Mèngzi and Confucius, and in all cases these early Rú see wise ministers as having a duty to guide their lords. Mèngzi in particular has an explicit account of how different sorts of hierarchy (of virtue, and of power/status) should interact. I discuss his understanding of these issues in Stalnaker (2013).

16. I discuss Xúnzi's views of obedience and loyalty in greater detail, along with the important special case of military leaders, in Stalnaker (2012).

17. There is a vast literature on the ambiguities of rule following in contemporary philosophy, much of it spurred on by Wittgenstein's seminal discussion (1958).

18. See Ing (2013, 2017), as well as Csikszentmihalyi (2004: 114–24) and Vankeerberghen (2005). I thank Michael Ing for his guidance on these issues.

19. On the period, see Loewe and Shaughnessy (1999: 587–650).

20. Lu (2010). See especially 235ff. for Lu's own interpretation.

21. Jung LEE (2013) has argued that there is no conception of moral obligation in early Confucianism and uses Bernard Williams's critique of "the morality system" in modern Western thought to criticize a range of readings of early Confucian texts in terms of moral philosophy. While I think his use of Pierre Bourdieu to illuminate the embodied nature of Confucian ritual is very insightful, Lee's account seems simply to miss the numerous ways early Confucian texts view various sorts of behavior as required and obligatory for people in various roles, as for instance in wide swaths of the *Lǐjì*.

22. I explore Mengzi's account of these intersecting grounds for respect and deference in Stalnaker (2013).

p. 279 23. This is not to say that friendship requires nothing, on an early Confucian account—far from it. The primary virtue of friends is "trustworthiness," which at a minimum appears to require keeping one's promises to one's friends, and thus being dependable in general. For further discussion of this point and of the specific requirements of each of the "five relationships," see Cottine (2014). I have benefited from conversations with Cheryl Cottine on all of these issues.

24. Note especially the "Duties of Students" 弟子職, *juan* 19 / *pian* 59 of the *Guǎnzi*, and the *Qūlǐ* 曲禮, *Lǐqì* 禮器, and *Nèizé*

內則 sections of the *Lǐjì*, or *Ritual Records*. For an English translation of the *Guǎnzi*, see Rickett (1985–1998); on the *Lǐjì*, see Stalnaker (2006: 159–186).

25. I describe Xúnzi's views of this process in much greater detail in Stalnaker (2006: 159–186).

26. The *Lǐjì* is a collection of a variety of texts about ritual from the Warring States and Han eras, which appears to have come together as a textual unit by the end of the Han dynasty. For a fascinating study of the text, see Ing (2012). For ease of reference, I have used the Chinese Text Project's electronically published text (http://ctext.org/liji), which is based on the widely available Tang dynasty edition, the 禮記正義. See Lü (2008). For an English translation, see Legge (1885).

27. For the textual issues here, see Lü (2008: 1415–16).

28. I borrow this phrase from Schwartz (1985: 106, and *passim*).

29. Xunzi distinguishes four basic stages of human development: "pettiness" or undeveloped humanity, who evaluate things only in terms of benefit; being an educated student of the way, which Xunzi refers to with the generic term 士 *shì*, educated man, who still requires support and guidance from others to reliably seek and accomplish the right goals; the truly noble *jūnzǐ*, who while still imperfect will pursue the Way unto death if necessary; and the sage, *shèngrén* 聖人, who perfectly incarnates Confucian conduct and can respond properly to any challenge, no matter how unusual or difficult. I outline these stages in Stalnaker (2006: 186–91). Note also Tiwald's discussion of Xunzi's distinction between "cultivated" and "great" *Rú*, in Tiwald (2012: 279).

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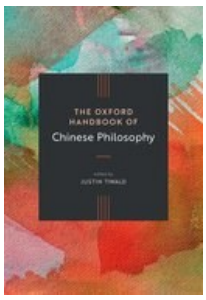

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CHAPTER

14 The Family–State Analogy in the *Mengzi*

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Abstract

This chapter argues that the resemblances between the state and the family in the *Mengzi* are superficial. The family is primary in that it ensures a moral life, as well as the perpetuation of tradition and lineage, while government is second in importance in that it is concerned with ensuring the socioeconomic conditions for the flourishing of families. This order of priorities explains why filial piety is unconditional whereas government is based on a conditional relationship between ruler and ruled. The chapter also shows that ideas typically associated with a conception of government as a family writ large do not apply to Mengzi. Mengzi's conception of the family is not particularly patriarchal and is not primarily defined through obedience, and his conception of political rule is neither hereditary nor based on divine right.

Keywords: Mengzi, the family, filial piety, the state, lineage, patriarchy, heredity, obedience, divine right

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I. Introduction

In the *Mengzi*, the ruler is admonished to act toward the people as a parent (*wéi mín fùmǔ* 為民父母). This trope, in addition to other aspects of the early Confucian texts, has led interpreters to argue that the Confucians present the family as a model for government.[1] In this chapter, I show that the resemblances between government and the family in the *Mengzi* are actually superficial. The family is primary and filial piety is unconditional; government is second in importance and is based on a conditional relationship between ruler and ruled. Parental and political authority are of different kinds.[2]

The chapter proceeds as follows: I first discuss the relationship between parents and children in the family, examining the nature of the obligations on both ends of this relationship and assessing the extent to which it is patriarchal. I then do the same for the ruler–ruled relationship, discussing the nature of political authority on Mengzi's view and showing that it is not absolute, divine, or

hereditary. In both of these sections, the early modern English theorist Robert Filmer will be used as a point of contrast with Mengzi. In the final section, I suggest ways to understand the relationship between family and state, drawing implications from the first two sections and using Aristotle as a point of contrast.

An analogy, by definition, is not a statement of identity; one might thus wonder about the usefulness of pointing to discrepancies between the two terms of the analogy, as I will. The point of the exercise, however, is not to poke holes in Mengzi's use of it; rather, it is to elucidate the nature of his conception of both the family and the state, as well as to contest interpretations of his thought that center obedience and patriarchy in either the family or the state, especially as they draw on this analogy.[3]

It should also be clarified here that the exercise is interpretive, not normative. The chapter focuses on such questions as the nature of
p. 283 paternal versus political authority as ↳ conceived by Mengzi, rather than on such questions as whether governments in contemporary Confucian societies should promote family values.[4] These sets of questions are related, yet distinct. One could accept that paternal and political authority are different for Mengzi but still argue that a proper adaptation of Mengzi to the contemporary world requires that political authority aim at promoting parental ties. The issues raised here are only partially relevant to such an argument.

II. The Family

i. Parental Love

In his encounters with rulers of different states, Mengzi admonishes them to treat their people well, describing such actions as akin to acting as a parent toward the people. More specifically, to be father and mother to the people (*wéi mín fùmǔ* 為民父母), the ruler should provide them with the resources and other means to avoid starvation (1A.4), reduce taxation (2A.5, 3A.3), and promote the worthy to government posts after consulting with those around him (1B.7). Interestingly enough, similar requirements are not actually advocated for parents in relation to their children.[5] Mengzi does not say that parents should provide for, or educate, their children. This is not due to the fact that Mengzi emphasizes other aspects of the way that parents should treat their children. Rather, he simply does not say much about the topic. Indeed, while the text of the *Mengzi* is rife with statements about filiality as central to being moral (1A.1, 2B.7, 3B.3, 4A.11, 4A.12, 4A.19, 4A.27, 4A.28, 6B.3, 6B.4, 7A.34) and as a crucial part of what it means to live a good life (1A.5, 1A.7, 1B.5, 3A.3, 3B.9, 5A.4), it barely contains any statements about parental love,[6] or injunctions about how parents ought to treat their children,[7] except for the idea that kindness (*ēn* 恩) and intimacy (*qín* 親) (2B.2, 3A.4), as well as humaneness (*rén* 仁) (7B.24), define the parent–child relationship. This means that we are actually led to draw conclusions about the obligations of parents from statements about the obligations of rulers, rather than the other way round.

One potential explanation for this near silence is that Mengzi, just like Kongzi and Xunzi, simply takes parents' love toward their children as a given. As Wejen CHANG argues, this "assumption must have been so widely accepted in ancient times that no proof was considered necessary" (Chang 1998: 122). It is not necessary to tell parents how to treat their children simply because they will naturally care for them. The same is presumably not true of children, who should be reminded of the gratitude they owe their parents and thus be encouraged to provide for the latter in old age and to treat them reverently during their life and after their death. The givenness of parental love, and the corresponding emphasis on the respect owed to them by their children, are illustrated in Kongzi's statement in the *Analects* in response to Yu's complaint about the length of the mourning period for his parents: "A child ceases to be
p. 284 nursed by his parents ↳ only when he is three years old … Was Yu not given three years' love by his parents?" (*Analects* 17.21)[8]

The problem with this explanation, however, is two-fold: First, Mengzi was clearly aware that parents were not always good to their children. Indeed, one example of a child mistreated by his parents is central to the text. Shun, the sage-king of antiquity who was sagely precisely because of his filiality, was harassed by his parents (his father, together with his brother and in complicity with his mother, comes up with complex plots to kill him [5A.2]). Mengzi does not draw on this example to offer a critique of bad parenthood; rather, he draws on it to offer an example of filial piety: the unwavering commitment of Shun to his parents, despite their cruelty. Thus, parental love is not a foregone conclusion for Mengzi. Second, Mengzi considers children's love toward their

parents to be natural (more on this later), without at the same time taking it for granted since he repeatedly advocates for filial piety. It cannot therefore be that he does not advocate for parental love simply because of its naturalness.

Why does Mengzi then only explicitly advocate for filial piety and not parental love? Perhaps Mengzi thought that advocating good behavior for the young is more likely to be successful than advocating the same for adults. Perhaps it is too late to fix the behavior of adults (parents) but not so for the behavior of the young and malleable (children). But this explanation does not completely hold up to scrutiny either, because filial piety is not applied to the young only; it is also directed at those who are themselves parents. Shun is an adult; in fact, his choice to get married (and, by implication, to become a parent) is glossed as being the paramount example of assuming the role of a dutiful son, not the role of a future parent (5A.2). Even more tellingly, Mengzi lists being partial to one's wife and children in such a way as to neglect one's parents as one of five main ways of being unfilial (4B.30)—more on this later. Even for adults, then, being filial is paramount, perhaps even more important than their duties toward their own children.[9]

Yet age does matter, albeit not in distinguishing between the malleable and the less malleable but, rather, in setting the direction in which deference is meant to flow. In youth and as adults, children owe deference to those older than they are, primarily to their own parents. Furthermore, hierarchies of age fit within a broader Confucian concern with historical continuity and deference to the past. Mengzi's emphasis on filial piety, rather than on parental love, should thus be understood to follow from the normative weight that accrues to parents as bearers of tradition, a point to which I will return.

ii. Filial Piety

In "The *Ru* Reinterpretation of *Xiao*," Keith Knapp argues that lineage (*zōng* 宗) had declined in the Warring States period (the period in which Mengzi is thought to have lived) in favor of families (*jīa* 家) (1995: 213–14) such that "*Xiao* [filial piety] was no longer directed towards the needs of the noble lineage, but to the needs of the patriarchal household" (221).[10] In what follows, I cast
p. 285 doubt on this interpretation of filial piety ↳ as it applies to Mengzi by discussing, first, what filial piety involves and, second, the specific issue of patriarchy.

The first point to make about filial piety on Mengzi's account is that it is natural, as I have intimated. Mengzi describes the way "a sweat broke on [children's] brows" when they saw the corpses of their parents being ravaged by foxes and flies, instigating the practice of burials (3A.5).[11] More pointedly, he says, "since [people] came into this world, no one has succeeded in inciting children against their parents" (2A.5). Indeed, he contends that the denial of one's parents amounts to losing one's humanity and becoming like an animal (3B.9).

That filial piety is natural should not be surprising since, for Mengzi, morality as a whole (the four moral seeds of *rén* [仁], rightness [*yì* 義], wisdom [*zhì* 智], and ritual propriety [*lǐ* 禮]) is part of human nature (*xìng* 性) (6A.1, 6A.2, 6A.7). At the risk of oversimplifying a rich debate,[12] we can describe Mengzi's conception of human nature as both descriptive and normative: it is descriptive in that it is a statement about the capacity of being moral that all human beings have; it is normative in that it is a statement about the goal that human beings should pursue, which is to develop this capacity to the fullest.

Filial piety (*xiào* 孝) can thus be described as both an inborn capacity and a virtue to be attained. Like the gut feeling of pity and compassion at a child about to fall into a well (2A.6), there is an instinctive expression of filiality that manifests itself without being learned (Shun 1997: 188–89), illustrated in the sweat that broke on children's brows. It might even be argued that filial piety is less prone to being corrupted (6A.8) than the feeling of compassion and other moral feelings; otherwise, people would have succeeded more often than Mengzi allows for at "inciting children against their parents." In short, filial piety is not only natural; it is also potentially more basic than the other moral tendencies.[13] Be that as it may, filial piety is not just a gut feeling; it is also a moral quality, associated with the highest Confucian virtue, namely, *ren* or humaneness.[14]

How, then, does this quality manifest itself? Mengzi is not very specific on this point, except in one passage, alluded to earlier, in which he lists five ways of being unfilial: the first is being lazy such as to neglect the needs of one's parents; the second is indulging in games and drinking such as to neglect their needs; the third is being concerned with material goods and being partial to one's wife and children such as to neglect the parents' needs; the fourth is indulging in sensual desires such as to disgrace them; and the fifth is being quarrelsome such as to endanger them (4B.30). The emphasis in these different examples is primarily on materially providing

for one's parents. But Mengzi also says that filiality involves caring for parents according to ritual, not only while they are alive but also when they die, including by observing the three-year mourning period (3A.2). In fact, Mengzi says that the crux of caring for the living (including parents) actually lies in the proper treatment of them after they die (4B.13).

Turning now to the question of obedience, Mengzi does not address the question of whether one should obey one's parents even if one disagrees with them; this pushes against any strong conclusion to the effect that obedience is the core of filial piety for
p. 286 Mengzi.[15] This is not to suggest that obedience is not in fact owed to one's parents, or that ↳ such obedience is conditional. As I argued in the preceding, filial piety is not conditional on parents' care, and children should tend to their parents whether or not the latter reciprocate. To argue that obedience is not the core of filial piety is merely to suggest that filial piety is not defined through obedience,[16] but through care. It might be that such care ultimately requires obedience; still, such obedience is not the distinctive element of filial piety.

To return now to mourning for parents, and specifically to the three-year mourning period, Knapp argues that it was a Confucian innovation directed at strengthening "the patriarchal household." For, according to him, only parents could be sacrificed to during this period, thus prioritizing parents over ancestors (Knapp 1995: 209, 213). Given that Mengzi mentions the three-year mourning period only in passing, and does not say much about sacrifice to other ancestors, it is hard to draw strong conclusions from it. Assuming, however, that Knapp is correct about the priority of parents over other ancestors, it is not clear why patriarchy follows: reverence toward the dead is not an obvious form of obedience. Moreover, one would have expected a patriarchal system to require a son to take over as patriarch after his father's death, rather than to persevere in continuing his father's ways after the latter dies. The concern with commemoration points not in the direction of patriarchy but of reverence for the past, as I intimated earlier: the father is not only a living figure, he is a symbolic figure of authority that continues to live after death, a tradition. Furthermore, mothers are to be mourned as well (7A.39); it is not only the father that is due respect and reverence in death.

In fact, while Mengzi, like other ancient thinkers, did not have much to say about women (and what little he did say suggests that he assumed that they hold an inferior position in society[17]), it is interesting to note that the emphasis in the family is on both father and mother (*fùmǔ* 父母), not on fathers (*fù* 父) alone. When the ruler is enjoined to act as a parent to the people in the examples described earlier, he is enjoined to be literally "father and mother" to the people (not just father to them). In the few references where it is the "father and older brother" (*fùxiōng* 父兄) that are mentioned,[18] and not both parents, the context is not the family as such but the different ranks in society, with "fathers and older brothers" mentioned to connote superior rank.[19] Thus, while superior positions in society are filled by men, the superior in the family is not just the father, but both parents.[20]

To see this, consider the one exception to the trend just described: in one instance in the extant text, Mengzi says that, in the family, children should serve their fathers and elder brothers (1A.5). Mengzi's conception of the family would be much more readily describable as patriarchal if the preceding statement were the rule, not the exception. This is not to suggest any gender egalitarianism on the part of Mengzi (after all the *Mengzi* is almost exclusively interested in the filial piety of men/sons, not women/daughters[21]); rather, the thought is merely that patriarchy is not central to Mengzi's conception of the family, contrary to what Knapp argues.[22] The fact that patriarchy is not central sets Mengzi's view apart from familiar (in the Western tradition) family-based conceptions of politics,[23] like that of Robert Filmer (c. 1588–1653), whose book *Patriarcha* was the principal target of John Locke's *First Treatise of Government*.[24]

p. 287 To conclude, I have argued in the first part of this chapter that filial piety is unconditional but that it does not necessarily revolve around obedience; rather, Mengzi focuses on the need to provide for one's parents, to treat them according to ritual propriety, and especially to mourn them appropriately after their death. I suggested that the concern for honoring parents' memory after they die points to Mengzi's concern with continuity with the past. Finally, I have illustrated that it is both parents, not the father alone, that are the object of filial piety in the *Mengzi*, dispelling the idea that Mengzi's conception of the family is patriarchal (in the sense of being centered on obedience to the father). In the second part of the chapter, I turn to discussing Mengzi's conception of the relationship between ruler and ruled.

III. The State

My aim in this section is to establish the following: whereas it should be clear, from this chapter's discussion so far, that filial piety is not conditional upon parental love, there is nothing unconditional about the ruler–ruled relationship. The maintenance of the latter relationship is conditional on each side's fulfillment of their end of the bargain: people's obedience is thus conditional upon the ruler's care, and the ruler's care is an extension of the people's loyalty. Moreover, Mengzi devotes as much attention (if not more) to advocating that the ruler care for his people as he does to suggesting that the people should obey the ruler. In this way, the political relationship is disanalogous with the parental relationship. As with the previous section of this chapter, I will also consider familiar ideas associated with the family analogy to government, in this case the issues of hereditary succession and of the divine grounds of political authority, and show how and why they do not apply to Mengzi.

i. Political Authority

Mengzi offers the concept of a *ren* government (*rénzhèng* 仁政) to describe his ideal conception of government. A *ren* government is one that, as suggested earlier, provides for its people through manifold regulations ensuring proper farming (1A.3, 3A.3), the free circulation of goods (1B.7, 2A.5, 3B.4), and limited taxation (1A.5, 3A.3, 7B.27) (El Amine 2015: 68–73). Joseph Chan, borrowing from Joseph Raz, describes this as a "service conception of authority" (Chan 2007: 188). As also argued earlier, Mengzi does not offer this same ideal of care with regard to parents' relation to their children. Moreover, in 7A.45, Mengzi says that a gentleman (*jūnzǐ* 君子) is *ren* toward the people but not intimate toward them in the way he is toward his parents. Thus, while *ren* is also otherwise used to describe the parent–child relationship,[25] *ren* has arguably a different valence in political, as opposed to familial, relationships.

p. 288 One way to reveal the difference between the two sets of relationships is by asking whether political authority is natural. On the one hand, Mengzi does not offer an account of how the political community[26] develops or of how a ruler (*wáng* 王 or *jūn* 君) arises. Neither does he present a story about people tending to the ruler equivalent to the story related earlier about the sweat breaking on people's faces when seeing the corpses of their parents. On the other hand, as mentioned in the preceding, Mengzi considers all moral dispositions to be part of human nature; thus, dispositions that can be attributed to the relationship of the people to the ruler, like loyalty (*zhōng* 忠) (1A.5, 7A.32), would be "natural" for him. Be that as it may, loyalty is not basic in the way that I have described filial piety to be. For, while loyalty might be "natural," no particular person is "naturally" its proper recipient, as a parent is a recipient of filiality. Indeed, as I will argue, any particular ruler can lose his authority based on his failure to satisfy the people.

Contrary to Mengzi, both Filmer and Aristotle argue that the political community is natural, though they do so on different grounds. For Filmer, the king obtains his divine right to rule from his descent from Adam.[27] This means that political authority is natural in the sense of being God given; it also means that it is hereditary. For Aristotle, on the other hand, the political community, the polis, exists by nature (*Politics* 1252b30) in the sense that it is the end, or purpose, of human life. I will return to Aristotle in the last part of this chapter. I turn now to showing that, in contradistinction to Filmer, Mengzi's conception of political authority is neither divine nor hereditary.

As to the question of the divine nature of political rule, Mengzi does say that the legitimacy of government depends on its enjoyment of the Mandate of Heaven (*tiānmìng* 天命). This is a concept that the Confucians took from the preceding [Western] Zhou Dynasty (1045–770 BCE).[28] Importantly, it is a crucial feature of the Mandate of Heaven that it is conditional. More specifically, it is conditional on the ruler's acting for the good of the people. For "Heaven sees with the eyes of its people. Heaven hears with the ears of its people," according to Mengzi (5A.5), citing the *Documents* Classic. More specifically, for Mengzi, the people signal Heaven's wishes by flocking to a ruler who ensures their welfare (2A.5) and, by implication, away from one who does not. In short, the Mandate of Heaven amounts to the people's approval, which is in turn conditional on the ruler's care. Hence, a ruler who mistreats his people is a ruler who has, ipso facto, lost the Mandate. Rulers are enjoined to act as parents to the people precisely to win them over and thus claim the Mandate. There is no notion here of a God-given right to rule that cannot be forfeited by the ruler.

As for the question of the hereditary nature of political rule, the first point to make here is that Mengzi is generally a proponent of appointment based on merit; in this regard, he is similar not only to the other early Confucians but to most other early Chinese

thinkers. In his much-interpreted discussion of the transfer of the throne among the sage-kings of antiquity, from Yao to Shun to Yu to Yu's son (5A.5 and 5A.6), however, he does express a preference, if qualified, for hereditary succession as the default mechanism for succession (El Amine 2015: 39–40). Yet this preference is motivated, on my interpretation, by a concern for political order (*zhì* 治), not a principled commitment to heredity as a ground for rights.[29] Indeed, inherited rights and privileges are precisely what the early Confucians set themselves up against. There is no inherited right to rule in the *Mengzi*.

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ii. The Duties (and Rights) of Subjects

Having described the nature, extent, and source of the authority of the ruler, I turn now to exploring political obligations on the part of subjects. More specifically, the question here is the extent of the duty owed by subjects to the ruler. To go back to Filmer's account as a point of comparison, Filmer's subjects' obedience is not conditional on the ruler's proper fulfillment of his role. Put differently, political power is absolute for Filmer. This follows from his idea that the political community is just like a family in which the father naturally rules over both his wife and his children and the latter naturally obey (Laslett 1949: 20). Contrary to this view, the people, on Mengzi's account, do not have an absolute duty of obedience to the government. In one example, Mengzi argues that it is understandable that a people will refuse to fight on a ruler's behalf when he has not provided for them in times of famine (1B.12). As I argued in the previous section, a ruler who mistreats his people is, on Mengzi's view, a ruler who has forfeited the Mandate of Heaven, that is, his claim to rule.

That the people do not owe absolute obedience to the ruler should not, however, be taken to imply that the people have the right to remove a bad ruler. Though the ruler–ruled relationship is conditional, it is neither contractual nor fiduciary (à la Locke) in the sense of being based on any deliberative agreement on the terms of the relationship between ruled and ruled (El Amine 2015: 44). Indeed, on Mengzi's account, only especially bad rulers are to be removed, and they are only to be removed by the virtuous elite, not by the common people.[30] What motivates the argument that it is only tyrants who are to be removed is the same logic that motivates Mengzi's willingness to allow hereditary succession: the concern with avoiding the disorder that would ensue from recurring changes to the throne (El Amine 2015: 40)—a concern that Locke shared as well. The reason it is the elites who have the prerogative of removing a tyrant is that, being virtuous themselves, they have the discernment needed to remove rulers only when necessary.[31] The common people's role is restricted to showing (physical) signs of approval or disapproval, on which the elites act (El Amine 2015: 47). Indeed, the people in Mengzi's account are generally described as passively and mechanically reacting to the ruler (like grass in the wind [3A.2] or water flowing downward [1A.6, 4A.9]). Their consent to being ruled is thus of an instinctive, not deliberative, kind (El Amine 2015: 43).

In any case, the point remains that although the political relationship is not contractual, and although the people do not choose which ruler to appoint and which ruler to remove from office, they are not expected to unconditionally obey, let alone love, the ruler. When people look up to a ruler as though he were a parent to them (*yǎng zhī ruò fùmǔ* 仰之若父母) (2A.5), they do so out of only metaphorical affection for him as a father figure, but out of actual affection for their own fathers to whom the ruler's benevolence allows them to tend (1B.1, 7B.27).[32] Whereas a son cares for his father whether or not the father is good to the son, the people only bestow their loyalty on a ruler who cares for them (or who, at the very least, does not harm them).

p. 290 ↳

IV. Family and State

In the preceding, I have investigated the nature of the parent–child and ruler–ruled relationships. My aim was to show the unconditional basis of filial piety as contrasted with the contingent basis of political loyalty. I have also argued that implications which typically follow from the family–state analogy (for example, in the case of Robert Filmer) are not true of Mengzi. For Mengzi, patriarchy is not central; rulers do not enjoy absolute or divine power, nor are they owed absolute obedience; and, finally, while Mengzi sometimes expresses a preference for hereditary succession, this preference is prudential, not based on a principled defense of heredity.

In this section, I turn more directly to the relationship between family and state in the *Mengzi*. I start by noting the following: Mengzi (like Kongzi and Xunzi) recognizes that the ruler, even if he is called upon to act as a father to his people, is also a father in a

more literal sense; he is an actual father to his actual sons and, more crucially (since Mengzi primarily discusses the other side of the relationship, as noted in the first part of this chapter), an actual son to his actual father. Mengzi is keenly aware of the possibility that these obligations might conflict; indeed, in 7A.35, he is presented with a hypothetical scenario in which this happens to none other than sage-king Shun and is asked to conjecture how the latter would respond to the conflict. The scenario involves Shun's father murdering another person, and Shun having to decide whether to allow the minister of justice to apprehend his father. According to Mengzi, Shun would not have prevented the minister of justice from doing his work, since this would involve interfering with the latter's assigned role. Since filiality, on the other hand, cannot allow him to turn his father in, Shun decides to abdicate the throne completely and to flee with his father to "the edge of the Sea," that is, to leave the community altogether. In the conflict between family and state, then, the ruler puts family first.[33] This points us in the direction of the priority, more generally, of family over government. In what follows, I investigate the basis and nature of this priority.

In his *Politics*, Aristotle criticizes those who hold that the roles of "statesman" and "household manager" differ "not in kind, but only in whether the subjects ruled are few or many" (1252a5–10). For him, the difference is not in the number of people ruled, but in the different purposes that these types of rule have. Put simply, household rule is about the satisfaction of needs, whereas political rule is about fulfilling one's nature/end, what he describes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as flourishing, or *eudaimonia*. I will now show that, like Aristotle, Mengzi draws a distinction between the aims of family and of government, although his distinction does not map onto Aristotle's. Indeed, while for Aristotle the political community is primary (an end in itself) and the family is instrumental, the opposite is true for Mengzi.

p. 291 The most common interpretation of the Confucian conception of government presents it as aimed at the promotion of virtue in the people. For example, for HSIAO Kung-Chuan, the aim of Confucian government is to make the common people "noble and virtuous in character and deed" (Hsiao 1979: 110).[34] Alternatively, I have argued elsewhere that political rule for Mengzi, and for the early Confucians more generally, is concerned with order, not virtue (El Amine 2015: 29–61). On my argument, since the common people (*mín* 民) cannot devote their lives to the pursuit of virtue, what Mengzi expects of them is not the achievement of cardinal virtues like *ren* but, rather, the achievement of what might be described as political virtues like loyalty and honesty (El Amine 2015: 34).

It is not difficult to see how the family could contribute to either/both goals: the philosophical literature on the Confucian conception of filial piety focuses on the ways the latter is conducive to the attainment of other virtues.[35] It is precisely the fundamental naturalness of filial piety that makes it fit to be extended (*dá* 達) to others (7A.15; see also 2A.6), and to also thereby contribute to the good of order and peace (4A.11). Be that as it may, it is arguably neither virtue nor order that is the primary, let alone exclusive, aim of filial piety and of the family. For this would suggest that the family is instrumental, a means toward the end of a virtuous or orderly society.[36] But the family, and the filial piety that sustains it, is an end in itself: it is the highest fulfillment of humans' moral tendencies—just as, for Aristotle, it is the polis that is the telos of human life. While for Aristotle, human beings are political animals, for Mengzi and the early Confucians more generally, humans are "familial animals," to borrow Ruiping Fan's expression (Fan 2010: 15).

To the extent that the family can be considered a means, it would be a means toward a goal that transcends current society: a means toward the continuity of society in time, or, more simply put, a means toward lineage.[37] Roger Ames thus finds "sincere family feeling and concern" to express "reverence for the continuity of one's lineage" (Ames 2011: 233). As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, filial piety is not just respect for one's own parents; it is also respect for the whole lineage that one's parents represent. As A. T. NUYEN puts it, "the father has his own father and the latter his and so on," such that the father "is not an independent figure of authority" but, rather, "a father figure representing tradition" (Nuyen 2004: 209)—though note here that the mother is also owed deference, thus arguably also representing tradition (El Amine 2024).

These various goals of the family (virtue, order, moral fulfillment, lineage) are not mutually exclusive; when they conflict, however, the importance of family in itself takes priority over its byproducts, whether virtue or order. Again, it is clear that Shun chooses family over state for "since [people] came into this world, no one has succeeded in inciting children against their parents" (2A.5).[38] Furthermore, the test of a government's success is its ability to allow children to tend to their parents (Mengzi does not make the opposite claim, namely, that the test of families' success is their ability to allow government to prosper). In short, while for Aristotle
p. 292 the family is concerned with economic matters that enable a polis whose end is *eudaimonia*, for Mengzi, government is ↳ concerned with ensuring the conditions for the flourishing of families and the maintenance of lineage.

The family-writ-large view of the Mengzian conception of the political community suggests an account of the latter as a large collectivity built around the fatherly figure of the ruler. But once one adds the more fundamental layer, namely, the actual families upon which the whole rests, the picture begins to look more like a network of families, with government providing the scaffolding that allows these to flourish.

V. Conclusion

If the family and the state are dissimilar in the ways I have suggested, why does Mengzi resort to describing the ruler as a parent to the people? One point to make here is that the analogy is in some ways a truism such that even theorists who disagree with it find some truth in it. Thus, Aristotle argues that kingly rule is to some extent similar to paternal rule since the former grows out of the latter (*Politics* 1252b15–25; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1160b20–30).[39] Mengzi does not offer a developmental story in which the first political community grows out of the family (or otherwise). But his resort to the analogy does also pick up on the naturalness of the parent–child relationship. The analogy thus arguably works simply as a useful heuristic to encourage rulers to aspire to something that resembles (but is not the same as) the care that parents can be expected to provide their children (even if they do not always live up to these expectations).

If this is true, then it would also push against reading paternalism in Mengzi's use of the family–state analogy: the idea that Confucian government involves treating the people as forever children who cannot make decisions on their own. Indeed, the only reference to (tending to) the people as if they were babies (*ruò bǎo chìzǐ* 若保赤子) is a quote in 3A.5 from the *Documents* Classic. While Mengzi does not have high expectations of the common people (7A.5), he does not have such low expectations of them either. In any case, it is not clear that the analogy is meant to suggest anything about the people as much as it is meant to suggest the importance of the ruler pursuing *ren* government that would earn him the loyalty of his people. Indeed, Mengzi does not start with the idea that the people are forever incapable of taking care of themselves and conclude that it is therefore necessary for the ruler to step in; rather, the argument is simply framed around the need for the ruler to provide the conditions under which the people have the means to provide for themselves (and, more importantly, for their parents).

In conclusion, Mengzi's resort to the parent–ruler analogy does not imply any strong similarities between family and state. While filial piety is not conditional, subjects' obedience to the ruler is. Relatedly, parental and political authority have different ends for Mengzi: it is the family that is primary and that ensures a moral life; on the other hand, politics is secondary and government is instrumental for family flourishing. I have also shown that ideas typically associated with a conception of government as a family writ large do not apply to Mengzi: Mengzi's conception of the family is not particularly ↳ patriarchal and is not primarily defined through obedience, and his conception of political rule is neither hereditary nor based on divine right.[40]

Notes

1. **For example, P. J. Ivanhoe writes in relation to Kongzi that "In a well-ordered state, society becomes the family, writ large. The king, as father—and according to some accounts, both father and mother—to his people, must care for them and as a proper parent provide for them in the broadest sense of the term" (Ivanhoe 1990: 3). LEE Seung-Hwan contends that "In Confucianism, a close-knit, harmonious family is taken as a paradigm of [the] ideal community" (Lee 1992: 253). LI Chenyang argues that "Mencius' form of government is what LIN Yutang has called 'parental government'" (Li 1997a: 185). Viren Murthy argues that Kongzi and Mengzi use "the family as a model for government" (Murthy 2000: 38). May Sim writes that while "Aristotle sharply distinguishes the political rule of statesmen from the household rule of fathers," "Confucius assimilates political rule into household rule; political government is simply the father–son relationship writ large" (Sim 2007: 166).**

2. **Suggestions to this effect have been made, in relation to early Confucianism generally, by TU Wei-Ming (1998: 125–31) and Joseph Chan (2004: 64–65), and in relation to Kongzi, by Bill Haines (2016).**

3. **For example, while acknowledging that the "the analogy is more metaphorical than literal," CI Jiwei argues that it draws its force from "the extension of the virtues of obedience and conformity that are cultivated within the family**

and clan to the larger realm of the state" (Ci 1999: 334). I will contest the point about obedience.

4. On the latter question, see, for example, Fan (2010), and, for an alternative view, Kim (2014: 144–53, 158–66).

5. In a similar vein, Joseph Chan points out that while the analogy is used in the *Great Learning* (which is part of the *Liji*—one of the *Rites* Classics) to suggest that acting as a parent to the people involves loving what they love and hating what they hate, the *Analects* suggests the reverse: "children should love and hate what their parents love and hate, not the other way round." See Chan (2004: 65; he cites *Analects* 1.11, 2.5 and 4.18). In what relates to parental love, the *Liji* contains one passage that speaks of fatherly kindness (*fù cí* 父慈), as it corresponds to filial piety (*zǐ xiào* 子孝); the passage also speaks of kindness on the part of older brothers and elders. See Sturgeon (2011, https://ctext.org/liji/li-yun [#18]).

6. One statement mentions babies held in arms (*hái tí* 孩提) consequently developing affection toward their close relatives (*qīn* 親) (7A.15).

7. One relevant statement is the idea that a father should not teach his own son, lest disagreement and estrangement ensue (4A.18). I thank Bill Haines for alerting me to it. For a similar idea (stating that fathers and sons should not demand goodness [*shàn* 善] of each other, as this risks undermining affection [*ēn* 恩] between them), see 4B.30. Another potentially relevant statement is that it is important to have worthy fathers and older brothers (*xián fùxiōng* 賢父兄) in order to have a model to follow (4B.7). But this is more about superior models than about family relationships per se, as will be suggested in my discussion of *fuxiong*.

8. Quoted from Lau (1979). This statement is repeated in the *San Nian Wen* chapter of the *Liji*. See Sturgeon (2011), https://ctext.org/liji/san-nian-wen [#6].

p. 294 9. On the priority of filial piety over parental love, in the *Yili,* one of the *Rites* Classics, the mourning requirements (including the garment to be worn and the length of the period of mourning) that apply to a son for his father only also apply to a father in relationship to the oldest son by the main wife. In relation to all other sons (who are thus not heirs), the requirements of mourning on the part of the father are less stringent (and therefore do not match what these sons would owe their father). See the *Sang Fu* chapter of the *Yili* (Sturgeon 2011, https://ctext.org/yili/sang-fu). The concern that the mourning requirements in the *Yili* reveal is thus with lineage, rather than with parental love. One passage in the *Liji* has Zengzi reprimanding Zixia for losing his eyesight while mourning for his son, an offense made worse by the fact that his mourning for his parents went unnoticed. See Sturgeon (2011, https://ctext.org/liji/tan-gong-i [#41]). It is also worth mentioning two telling instances that Robin Yates relates from the legal code of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE): first, that theft applies to a son taking something (stealing) from his father but not vice versa (i.e., a father could not be accused of theft against his son) (Yates 2001: 296); second, that parents were permitted to kill or punish their children for not being filial (297). In the same vein, Edwin Pulleyblank mentions a case discussed in AD 502 during the Northern Wei Dynasty of a man who sells his daughter to bury his mother (Pulleyblank 1958: 207–8). Not only is this story telling in itself, but the verdict is even more significant: the court decides to pardon the father because his selling of his daughter was an expression of filial piety. It should also be noted, however, that the court sentenced the person who bought her to five years of hard labor with the argument that he bought a "good" person, not a criminal, i.e., someone who could not legitimately be enslaved (208).

10. The breakdown of kinship ties during the Warring States period is central to the argument about social mobility offered by HSU Cho-yun (1965: 2). ZHAO Dingxin offers a different view of the status of lineage in this period. He argues that the social transformations "brought about by interstate military conflicts" did not "fundamentally … destroy China's inherited, family-based political orders, because all of the territorial states that emerged during late Eastern Zhou, including Qin, had developed from lineage-based city-state predecessors without neck-breaking political or societal disruption" (Zhao 2015: 92). He also contends that "Chinese philosophers of the time, in particular those whom we today regard as more or less Confucian, often drew inspiration from idealized lineage law in theorizing the bases of a good society" (62).

11. All translations from the *Mengzi* are drawn from Lau (2004). For the Chinese text, I have relied on Sturgeon (2011, http://ctext.org/mengzi/).

12. For more on this debate, see Ames (1991); Bloom (1994); and Bloom (1997).

13. Mengzi also singles out respect for elders (*jìng zhǎng* 敬長) to be basic in the same way in 7A.15.

14. This quality is associated with *ren* in three instances. In 7A.15, Mengzi argues, that no babies held in arms do not know to love (*ai* 愛) their close relatives, and that the feeling of affection (*qīn* 親) toward these close relatives amounts to *ren*. In 7B.24, Mengzi says that *ren* between father and child is part of the mandate (*mìng* 命), i.e., destined, fated, inevitable. In 4A.27, Mengzi says that the content of *ren* is to serve one's parents (*shì qīn* 事親). It should be noted, however, that *ren*, as a virtue, is supposed to involve more than a mere feeling of affection, though Mengzi does not actually say very much about *ren* as an individual quality (focusing more on *ren* as an attribute of government).

15. In 4A.26, he justifies Shun's decision to marry without telling his parents (which could be understood as a form of
p. 295 disobedience) by suggesting that filiality requires leaving heirs. ↳ The anecdote arguably cuts both ways: it shows on the one hand that filiality is not always synonymous with obedience, but it also suggests that obedience can only be trumped for exceptional reasons.

16. As Ames puts it, "*Xiao* that is grounded in the bottom-up deference and respect children owe to their elders must be distinguished clearly from *paterfamilias* and the *patria potestas*—the paternal top-down, unilateral power and privilege that we associate with Roman culture" (Ames 2011: 185). I will compare Mengzi's view with Robert Filmer's—the latter partakes of this Roman conception.

17. See, for example, 3B.2, 4B.33.

18. There are only 5 references to *fuxiong* in the received text of the *Mengzi* compared with 39 references to *fumu*.

19. 1B.11, 3A.2, 4B.7, and 4B.31. In all these cases, Lau translates *fuxiong* as "elder(s)."

20. Geneviève Rousselière has suggested to me that the lack of emphasis on the primacy of the father points to the idea that Mengzi (and the early Confucians more generally), unlike early modern Western theorists, do not require that sovereignty be unitary or undivided. Indeed, contrary, for example, to HAN Feizi, the early Confucians are not overly concerned with emphasizing the importance of the ruler as final arbiter and allow for a significant division of authority between the ruler and his ministers (see El Amine 2015: 124–35).

21. With the exception of 3B.2.

22. As Michael Nylan writes in relation to the *Liji*, the concern is less "with gender relations than with generational hierarchy—the submission of all members of the younger generation, male and female, to those in the older generation" (Nylan 2001b: 187).

23. According to Peter Laslett, the analogy between the family and the state "appears so frequently in the writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it occupies such an important place in so many of them, that it can be justifiably supposed that its use during this period was one of the reflections of patriarchal institutions" (Laslett 1949: 27). Among the theorists, besides Filmer, whom Laslett cites here are Bodin, Hooker, Grotius, Bellarmine, Suarez, Arnisaeus, Hobbes, Locke, and Pufendorf, all of whom draw analogies between "the law of the family" and "the laws of political society" (27). Laslett partly attributes this phenomenon to the influence of Roman law (28). More pointedly in relation to the argument of this chapter, he contends that it was an easy step from a claim of analogy between family and state to a merging of the two, such that "thinkers would be found who would claim that the king was the father and the family was the state" (28). Laslett explains that it was not necessarily Filmer who made this leap, but that it was implicit in the idea that Adam was also first king, which had entered Europe in the late 16th century.

24. Locke rejects, among others, the idea that kings enjoyed a divine right to rule. In Chapter VI ("Of Paternal Power") of his *Second Treatise*, he also rejects the idea that paternal rule is absolute, the idea that fathers alone have authority over children, and the idea that political authority is based on paternal authority.

25. See 4A.27, 7A.15, and 7B.24.

26. While he takes for granted the existence of states (*guó* 國), he also posits all-under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下) as the highest ideal. Sorting out his views on forms of political organization goes beyond the scope of this chapter. For further exploration of this topic, see Chan (2001), Nylan (2001a), and Pines (2002).

27. For Filmer, thus, the political community is literally a (blood-based) family. As Laslett writes summarizing Filmer, "all subsequent humans sprang from the same source, they were all naturally, physiologically, related to each other,"
p. 296 which meant that "the ↳ relationship between all human beings [was] naturalistic; it was a physical bond" (Laslett

1949: 11–12). The division of the world between different states followed upon Noah's division of the world between his sons, such that "these new states were families, and … their heads, their patriarchs, were fathers" (14).

28. A comprehensive discussion of the Mandate of Heaven is beyond the scope of this chapter. For further exploration, see Eno (1990).

29. One exception here is Mengzi's seeming approval of the descendants of officials receiving hereditary emolument (see 1B.5, 3A.3).

30. For a fuller presentation of this argument, see Tiwald (2008).

31. On Tiwald's account, "Heaven's approval … is something that only those who already rule some territory can receive" since only they enjoy "the staging ground" to become rulers themselves. See Tiwald (2008: 276).

32. I thus disagree with Tiwald that the people feel actual "love" toward their ruler or more generally that the model of political loyalty being presented is akin to filial piety. See Tiwald (2008: 270, 276).

33. Though crucially he does not do so by violating the rules of the political community (he does not order the minister of justice not to apprehend his father). There is thus an attempt here at arriving at what Stephen Angle describes as a "harmonious solution" (Angle 2009: 96).

34. See also Schwartz (1985: 96–97).

35. See, for example, Li (1997b).

36. In a more cynical vein, viewing the family as aimed at encouraging such political dispositions as loyalty can lead to the conclusion that the *Mengzi* and other early Confucian texts aim to "indoctrinate the population in its proper submission to its rulers," which is how "several generations of Marxist and Maoist ideology" have read them according to Ames. See Ames (2011: 188).

37. Or, as BAI Tongdong puts it, "for Confucians 'human interests' have a historical dimension, and are not exclusively the realm of living human beings" (Bai 2012: 67).

38. Sor-hoon Tan points to 4B.29 where Yu and Hou Ji (both ministers to Shun) are said to have "passed their own door three times without entering" (*sān guó qí mén ér bù rù* 三過其門而不入) as an instance in which worthy ministers choose the state over the family. See Tan (2002: 176). See also 3A.4. Yet the example could also be taken to mean that Yu chooses service over comfort, rather than politics over family.

39. I thank Bill Haines for alerting me to this.

40. For incisive comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, I thank Sandra Field, Bill Haines, Geneviève Rousselière, Justin Tiwald, an anonymous reviewer, and, as always, Kevin Mazur. I also wish to thank the participants in the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy at The American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, San Francisco, April 2015, for a helpful discussion.

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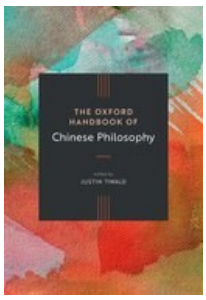

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CHAPTER

15 The *Dao* of han Fei

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Abstract

Most investigations of the great pre-Qin political philosopher HAN Fei begin analyzing his thought by investigating three facets of his philosophy: law, positional power, and administrative techniques. While understanding these concepts is essential to understanding HAN Fei's thought, beginning with and interpreting them in light of his predecessors, to whom their origin is often attributed, may lead to an inaccurate understanding of his thought as a whole. This chapter argues that to understand his political philosophy, it is essential to reach a deeper understanding of his conception of the *dao* (way) and how it undergirds this philosophy. In this preliminary attempt to understand HAN Fei's conception of the *dao*, the chapter argues that he sees this *dao* as underlying all natural and human processes and that his advice to the ruler about the methods, laws, and techniques that are appropriate is aimed at ensuring that the members of the community act in the ways that will best ensure its survival, particularly in instances when they would otherwise be disinclined to act. HAN Fei, then, uses his conception of the *dao* as the basis for constructing a mechanical bureaucratic and legal Leviathan to which the ruler plays the role of the phantom oiler. Emulating the cosmic *dao* while tying all his tools back to this *dao*, the ruler remains a mysterious figure, whose image is made even more awesome by the inevitability of his reactions to those within the state whose actions do not accord with his conception of the *dao*.

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I. Introduction

HAN Fei (韓非, ca. 280 BC–233 BC) was a Warring States philosopher and political theorist, traditionally labeled as the synthesizer of legalist thought and for centuries, both within China and from outside, attacked as an immoral, Machiavellian totalitarian whose sole interest was in consolidating and increasing the power of the ruler. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to delve more deeply into HAN Fei's political philosophy, examining ways in which his arguments challenge the very core of Confucian virtue-based political schemes, how his organizational theory allowed for the development of a strong, stable, and well-organized state bureaucracy, and how his legal thought advocated a strong and inviolable legal code, clearly promulgated and binding upon all.[1] Nonetheless, there are still a myriad of questions about his political thought awaiting further investigation, among them the role accorded to the *dào* 道 (way). This chapter is a preliminary attempt to come to a deeper understanding of HAN Fei's conception of the *dao* and how it influences his political philosophy.

One of the basic meanings of the term *dao* is a physical path, but in early Chinese texts its connotation broadened to refer to a way of doing something, and, in many cases, the right way to do them. Texts like the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* used it even more broadly, referring to the underlying nature of the universe. In this sense, we can think of the *dao* as the way things are. Indeed, it would not be incorrect to construe much of the debate in early Chinese philosophy as a debate over the right *dao*—the right way.[2] Writing after such texts such as the *Analects*, *Mozi*, *Mengzi*, *Xunzi*, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and others had investigated these ideas and laid out their understandings, HAN Fei had a wealth of resources to draw upon, and his debts to these and other thinkers are clear throughout his writing. However, as we shall see, his vision of the *dao* and the aspects he focuses on differ in important ways from his predecessors.

While there are those who are skeptical of attempting to understand HAN Fei's references to the *dao* as constituting anything close to
p. 300 a comprehensive, ↳ noncontradictory conception, others have argued that it is possible to make sense of the various ways in which HAN Fei uses this term.[3] It is the latter path that this chapter shall take. Let us begin by looking at HAN Fei's broadest conception of the *dao*, which I label the "cosmic *dao*." HAN Fei tells us,

> [1] The *dao* is the beginning of the myriad things, the guideline of right and wrong. Because of this, the clear-sighted ruler abides by the beginning so as to understand the source of the myriad things, and puts into order the guidelines so as to understand the beginnings of success and failure.[4] (5/6/21, Harris 2023: 324–25; Watson 2003:15)

HAN Fei further expands on this conception of the cosmic *dao* elsewhere, writing,

> [2] The *dao* is vast and grand and yet without shape, and its potency[5] is manifested in the patterns of things and reaches everywhere. As it extends to all living things, if it is deliberated upon and employed, then the myriad things will all flourish, but it does not dwell in these things. The *dao* encompasses all things below, and so if it is used as the basis for regulation, then things will flourish and decline at the appropriate times. If one compares names and differentiates among things, then one can grasp the nature of the one *dao*. Thus it is said that the *dao* is not the same as the myriad things [that it creates], potency is not the same as the *yīn* and *yáng* [that it contains], scales are not the same as the lightness or heaviness [that they measure], plumb lines are not the same as the indentions and protrusions [that they are used to eliminate], reed tuning instruments are not the same as the relative humidity [that they are used to adjust for], and the ruler is not the same as the body of ministers [that he controls]. All of these six arise from the *dao*, but the *dao* itself is not divided, and thus it is called the One. (8/11/5–9, Watson 2003: 37)

Several points arise out of such a conception of the *dao*. It is conceived of as the source of everything that exists and as providing the standard by which everything can be evaluated. It gives rise to the patterns and regulations of the natural world (*lǐ* 理)[6] and is simultaneously "the way things naturally are" and the reason why things are this way. As ZHANG Jue notes, in this "philosophic" sense, the *dao* points to the regulations of heaven, earth, and the myriad things, up to and including the objective laws of the entire universe (Zhang 1992: 51; 2004: 2–7).

As SONG Hongbing has noted, HAN Fei advocates gaining a deeper understanding of this cosmic *dao* and according with it in all spheres of life, including the political (Song 2010: 109–20). In order to be successful, on HAN Fei's account, it is necessary to follow

what is naturally so and not to try to go against established patterns:

> [3] Those of ancient times who perfected the great whole gazed out at Heaven and earth, observed the rivers and seas, and followed the mountains and valleys. They were like the sun and the moon in their illumination and like the four
p. 301 seasons in their actions. Like the clouds they spread out and like the wind they moved…. They ↳ did not oppose the patterns of Heaven, nor did they harm their own dispositions or natures…. They abided by the established pattern and accorded with what was naturally so. (29/60/21–24; Harris 2023: 344–45)

Of course, advocating coming to an understanding of the natural patterns of the world so that they can be adhered to is not something unique to HAN Fei. We see this idea in a range of early texts, though it is perhaps most conspicuous in the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Shenzi Fragments*, and it is clear that HAN Fei is deeply influenced by these thinkers, appropriating them in many ways as he develops his ideas.[7] However, it would be a mistake to assume too tight a connection between the *Laozi* and HAN Fei.[8] While both advocated following what was natural, their understandings of what this entailed were vastly different. The *Laozi*, for example, argues against the use of laws and edicts, for they move people away from the natural path, giving rise to chaos while, as we shall see, HAN Fei argues that an appropriate understanding of the natural path gives rise to effective laws and edicts.[9]

This cosmic *dao* is certainly central to HAN Fei's philosophic thought. However, he uses the *dao* in a variety of instances where it is not immediately clear what, if any, relationship there is to the cosmic *dao*, speaking, for example, of the *dao* of the ruler,[10] the *dao* of the minister,[11] the *dao* of endangering oneself,[12] and the *dao* of ordering the state,[13] among many others. The term is certainly complex, but there are connections among these various usages of the term, and coming to understand them will allow us to more clearly grasp HAN Fei's overall project. In particular, these various, limited, usages of the term can all be seen as arising out of the broader cosmic *dao*, elucidating particular principles for particular situations that are manifestations of the principles and patterns of the cosmic *dao*.[14]

II. Different *Daos*

The cosmic *dao* can be broken up and analyzed in many different ways, but one way potentially useful for understanding HAN Fei is to think of two general senses: (1) the *dao* as providing a model or set of rules that needs to be followed as a precondition for survival or success and (2) the *dao* as something that the ruler should endeavor to emulate or become.[15]

Insofar as the cosmic *dao* is the origin of the patterns and regulations of the universe, it also provides standards that must be followed if there is to be hope of regular success in any human endeavor. As such, it would make sense to talk about the *dao* of the ruler, the *dao* of ministers, even the *dao* of farmers, craftsmen, or soldiers. In each case, the *dao* would refer to those aspects of the cosmic *dao* that are relevant to the tasks these various individuals are engaged in. The basic idea is that one's actions, regardless of
p. 302 who one is, will not be effective if one does not take into account the nature of the universe and ↳ its constituent parts, (which, as we see, includes the natures and tendencies of human beings.)

In making this move, in focusing on the *dao* in particular areas, HAN Fei is arguing that our understanding of how the natural world works allows us to better interact with the natural world—using fire to ensure the safety of food, building dikes to prevent flooding, constructing roads to transport goods, and many other things.[16] However, it goes beyond this, for an understanding of the broader *dao* also allows for an understanding of human dispositions and how human beings work. Just as an understanding of the materials of the natural world allows us to effectively build ditches and dikes to control, manipulate, and employ floodwaters, so too does an understanding of humans and their characteristics allow us to effectively control, manipulate, and employ them.

Among these more narrowly construed *daos* is what we might think of as the "political" *dao*, what HAN Fei variously refers to as the *dao* of the enlightened ruler, the *dao* of order, and the *dao* of success, among others. These *daos* take into account those aspects of the broader cosmic *dao* that have direct relevance to ruling and ordering the state, and this political *dao* provides a model that must be followed in all areas as a precondition for reliable successes in the political arena. The following passage showcases more clearly the political aspects of the *dao*:

> [4] Those in ancient times who perfected the great whole gazed out at Heaven and earth, observed the rivers and seas, and followed the mountains and valleys. They were like the sun and the moon in their illumination and like the four seasons in their actions. Like the clouds they spread out and like the wind they moved. They did not clutter their minds with cleverness nor clutter their selves with private interests. They entrusted questions about order and chaos in governing to laws and techniques, entrusted questions about right and wrong to rewards and punishments, and subordinated questions about weight to steelyards. They did not oppose the patterns of Heaven, nor did they harm their own dispositions or natures. They did not blow on hairs to seek out trifling flaws, nor did they wash away filth in order to scrutinize those things that are difficult to understand. They did not draw things in from beyond the ink line, nor did they push things out from within the ink line. They were not anxious what was outside the purview of the law, nor were they hesitant about what was within the purview of the law. They abided by the established pattern and accorded with what was naturally so. Misfortune and fortune arose from the *dao* and the law, and not from the ruler's likes and dislikes. The responsibility for honor and shame lay with the people themselves, and not with others. Therefore, the generation was completely peaceful, and the law was like the morning dew: pure, simple, and undiluted. (29/60/21–25; Harris 2023: 344–45)

What we can see from this passage is the close connection between the broader *dao* and the methods of ruling. By coming to understand the patterns of heaven and the dispositions and natures of human beings, the ruler is able to establish a set of laws and employ a set of techniques to order the state. Furthermore, having implemented these laws, it is not necessary to investigate the
p. 303 particulars of any given situation beyond ↳ asking the question of whether the situation is covered by the laws. When questions arise about whether a particular action would lead to order or disorder, they can be answered by reference to the laws, while when questions of right and wrong arise, they can be answered by reference to the stipulated rewards and punishments.[17]

On such an account, the relationship between laws or rewards/punishments on the one hand and order or right/wrong on the other is analogous to the relationship between litmus paper and acidity. Litmus paper can be used to determine the acidity of a particular solution, but it does not *cause* the solution to have this particular acidity. Rather, litmus paper is created based on an understanding of chemistry as it relates to acidity such that it turns a particular color depending on the actual acidity of the solution. In a similar fashion, rewards and punishments do not *cause* an action to be right or wrong. Rather, they are developed based on an understanding of the cosmic *dao*, of the world around us, and its various components as they relate to ordering human beings and creating a strong and stable state, such that the things that are rewarded are those things that are right and the things that are punished are the things that are wrong.

Thus, when the term *dao* is being used in its political sense, it points to those models, laws, and regulations that the ruler must understand and abide by to effectively control and order those under his rule. However, it is not sufficient simply to take into account the regular patterns of the inanimate natural world, as Einstein as well was aware.[18] Rather, the ruler must also take into account the basic dispositions and natures of human beings, for these are also constituent parts of the broader *dao* and have significant impact on what methods will be effective in ordering the state.

In brief, HAN Fei's conception of human nature is that individuals are born with relatively stable interest sets that do not change in any appreciable manner throughout their lives. As such, they are not amenable to cultivation, moral or otherwise.[19] There may be instances in which it appears that one's interest set has changed. However, in reality, what has happened is that the individual has re-evaluated what actions will best allow her to achieve her interests. In addition, for the vast majority of individuals, these interest sets are mostly self-regarding, with people generally acting in ways that they perceive to be in their own best interest. HAN Fei does not deny that we have other-regarding feelings and that these give rise to actions, but he is quite suspicious of the strength of these feelings in relation to our self-regarding ones.[20]

The patterns of human dispositions, then, place restraints on the actions of the ruler that are analogous to the restraints placed upon him by the patterns of the natural world. Just as taking farmers away from their planting in the spring in order to conduct a war or jumping off a 100-foot sheer cliff face will lead to negative consequences, so too will ignoring basic facts about human beings and their motivations. And, although HAN Fei himself does not make the analogy, he would seem to view attempts to change people's natures as on a par with attempts to reverse gravity.[21]

Such a conception of the *dao* as providing a model or set of rules that needs to be followed as a precondition for survival or success is not limited to the ruler. Rather, we can make sense of the *dao* of the minister, a *dao* that HAN Fei notes is importantly different
p. 304 from the *dao* of the ruler, as each has different aims. Additionally, this narrower ↳ conception of the *dao* is not limited to the political, for it would make sense to talk of the *dao* of an artisan or the *dao* of an archer. On HAN Fei's understanding of these more limited forms of the *dao*, they pick out those aspects of the broader cosmic *dao* that are relevant for the particular task at hand. However, while these *daos* will all be different, they are interconnected as components of the broader *dao*. Therefore, they are tools that can be employed for analyzing society and determining how the various parts fit together into a whole that can be better understood and predicted. Recalling the end of passage [2], we can see that they arise from the cosmic *dao*, the great whole, the One to which everything refers.

In addition to discussing the *dao* as a source of criteria for successful action, HAN Fei also depicts the *dao* in the second sense mentioned, as something that the ruler should endeavor to emulate or in some sense become. What this means, though, is not immediately clear. Some have taken this to mean that HAN Fei is once again following the *Laozi*, in this case in a process of self-cultivation leading to internal changes. However, as we saw earlier, HAN Fei believes we are stuck with the natures we arrive with—any substantive change is impossible, and the ruler is certainly no exception to this.[22]

However, there are still important ways in which the ruler can model himself upon the *dao*. In passage [2] above, HAN Fei describes the *dao* as the source of all things manifest in our world, and yet as being of a higher order than the things it gives rise to. The *dao*, lacking a definite shape, cannot be seen, and while it has a function, its function cannot be completely grasped. In light of this understanding of the cosmic *dao*, HAN Fei advises the ruler to emulate the *dao*, appearing empty, still, and invisible, such that he cannot be fathomed, a point that shall be discussed in more detail shortly.

Such advice is importantly different from our earlier discussion of how HAN Fei wishes the ruler to follow the regular patterns of the *dao* and accord with them. Rather, in this second sense, the ruler is told to emulate the cosmic *dao*, act as the cosmic *dao* does, and possess the same qualities as the cosmic *dao*.[23] There is a range of reasons underlying this advice. First, there is a sense of predictability about the cosmic *dao*. The movements of the sun and the moon, the changes of the seasons, and the coming of the rains all follow regular patterns, patterns that others can take into account and use as the basis for deciding how and when to act. Furthermore, these things are inevitable. The sun and the moon cannot be stopped, nor can the seasons be altered. Therefore, if the ruler can instill in the minds of his subjects that his actions and decisions have the same sense of predictability and inevitability, the people will naturally adapt themselves, just as they adapt to the natural world around them. They will come to understand the consequences of various courses of actions and the impossibility of gaining what they desire through means other than those regulated within the state. Once the ruler has successfully emulated the *dao* in this fashion, the people will no more expect leniency from the ruler if they violate his laws and edicts than they would expect leniency from the cosmic *dao* if they were to be caught in the midst of a flash flood or to fall off the side of a steep cliff. The ruler is perceived as yet another force of nature, and further, just as the natural world is held blameless should someone slip, so too is the ruler blameless if someone were to break his laws and edicts.

p. 305 An additional aspect of this advice that the ruler model himself on the cosmic *dao* is the creation of an impenetrable division between ruler and ruled that is analogous to the division between the *dao* and all that the *dao* creates. As Albert Galvany writes, "The relationship between sovereign and subject is as asymmetrical and incommensurable as that which exists, on the cosmological plane, between the Way [*dao*] and individual and differentiated existences" (Galvany 2013: 104). The cosmic *dao*, as we saw in passage [2], is the source of the myriad things yet is itself distinct and separate from them. The ruler's modeling himself on the *dao*, then, consists in recognizing that the position of ruler is one of control over those within the state that is importantly similar to the *dao*'s position of control over the all the various components of the universe.

Another significant component of this emulation of the *dao* on the part of the ruler is the recognition that part of what gives the *dao* its awesomeness is not just its power and majesty, but also the fact that it cannot be fully understood. While certain aspects of it can be understood, and are very clear, as a whole it is quite incomprehensible. HAN Fei picks up on the value of this and encourages the ruler to cultivate just such an air of incomprehensibility:

> [5] The *dao* lies in what cannot be seen; its use lies in what cannot be understood. Be empty and tranquil without engaging in affairs, and from the darkness observe others' faults. Observe but do not be observed; listen but do not be heard; understand but do not be understood (5/7/1–2; Harris 2023: 326; Watson 2003: 16–17).

Such a scheme, if successfully implemented, further increases the division between ruler and ruled, leading to the people being no more capable of comparing themselves to their ruler than they could compare themselves to the cosmic *dao*. Furthermore, this evinces an understanding on HAN Fei's part that what cannot be understood can only be followed. It is only once one understands the reasons behind something that it is possible to begin a search for a way to reliably manipulate it.

III. Practical Implications

So far, we have been looking at HAN Fei's overall conception of the *dao* and its various manifestations. However, as we have also seen, HAN Fei's overriding goal is quite a practical one—ensuring that the state is stable, ordered, and flourishing. To this end, he spends quite some time giving pragmatic advice about the various tools the ruler has at his disposal. As most who have read, or read about, HAN Fei know, he is generally credited with developing and applying three main ideas in the political sphere: *fǎ* 法, which can be variously translated as "model," "standard," or "law"; *shù* 術, a certain set of political and bureaucratic techniques; and *shì* 勢, which refers to positional power. The usual account is that he appropriates these three ideas from earlier thinkers in the "legalist" tradition, integrating and developing them into a unified set of tools for state control.

p. 306 While it is certainly true that these concepts are central to HAN Fei's political philosophy, and much of his advice to rulers revolves around detailing how most effectively to implement these tools, it is important to recognize that HAN Fei does not see them as having intrinsic or independent value. Rather, they are useful insofar as they are expressions of the *dao*, and their content is restrained by the *dao*. When referring to the law (*fa*), for example, HAN Fei is clear that its content must be restrained:

> [6] If one accords with the *dao* to perfect the law, those of noble rank will be delighted, and great villainies will cease. One will be tranquil, idle, and still, according with the mandate of Heaven, and holding on to the great whole. Thus, one will ensure that people not commit crimes by departing from the law, and that fish not suffer the calamity of being out of water. When it is like this, there is little in the world that cannot be achieved. (29/60/30; Harris 2023: 346)

HAN Fei never takes the tack of arguing that the ruler has a moral obligation to only implement certain laws, or that a ruler is only a true ruler if he adheres to a certain standard. However, this does not mean that he lacks any sense of normativity. Indeed, as we saw earlier, he talks about standards of right and wrong and good and bad. These standards, though, are related to success criteria, and the *dao* is seen as the only basis upon which success can regularly be achieved. By coming to a more complete understanding of the relevant parts of the cosmic *dao*, it is possible to determine what things are prerequisites for success. Thus, if the success criteria involve (as HAN Fei assumes) developing a strong and stable state, then those laws that can be labeled good or those actions that can be labeled right are those that will lead to such strength and stability, just as good litmus paper is that which can be used to accurately determine the acidity of a particular solution.

Therefore, while HAN Fei never overtly tries to restrain the power of the ruler by explicitly limiting what they have the power to do, he does work hard to demonstrate that the law is one of the most effective tools for strengthening and stabilizing the state and that if it is to serve effectively in this capacity, it must be severely restrained by the cosmic *dao*, by facts about the world and human beings. It is only by understanding certain components of the *dao* that it will be possible to construct laws that will be effective in ordering the state and its people.

These laws work by according with the natures and dispositions of human beings—with the way that human beings are—rather than trying to change these natures and dispositions. As we saw earlier, HAN Fei advises the ruler to accord with the *dao*, and this extends to how he is to deal with others. Rather than trying to change them, the ruler should take advantage of these natures and dispositions, and correctly chosen laws are an effective means to do just this.

As publicly promulgated edicts with well-known punishments attached to their violation, these laws do not work by changing people's desires. They simply change the ways that people *act* on their desires. On HAN Fei's accounts, a law against stealing apples
p. 307 does not lead people to no longer desire to steal apples when hungry. Rather, when a ↳ punishment such as chopping off the hand is attached to a law against stealing apples, people are given a new choice. They can gain an apple and lose a hand, or they can keep their hand but not gain an apple. As such, the act of refraining from stealing the apple is not a manifestation of a character change or a lessening of a desire for the apple. Rather, it merely indicates that a different and stronger desire has been activated—the desire to keep one's hand attached to one's body. We can imagine the potential thief saying to himself, in a paraphrase of Mengzi, "An apple is something I desire; my hand is also something I desire. If I cannot have both, I will forsake the apple and choose my hand."[24] So long as they are certain and do not admit of exceptions, laws (and the rewards and punishments attached to them) can make use of human nature to control, drive, and motivate the vast majority of the ruler's subjects.

The law is not the only tool for political organization and control that HAN Fei relates back to the *dao*. We also see a similar move made in discussing the concept *shù* 術, which refers to a particular set of techniques, described thus:

> [7] Administrative techniques (*shu*) dictate awarding offices on the basis of qualifications, following proposals in evaluating results, grasping the handles of life and death, and examining the abilities of the assembled ministers. This is what the ruler controls. (43/131/8–9; Harris 2023: 353)

These techniques involve both determining which individuals should serve in which positions within the bureaucracy and how to assess their actions once they are in these positions. And, again, there are constraints on which techniques will be successful, for this is dependent upon certain aspects of the cosmic *dao*. HAN Fei elsewhere elaborates on seven particular techniques that he sees as central to political organization:

> [8] As for the techniques leading to peace, the first is ensuring that rewards and punishments follow right and wrong; the second is ensuring that fortune and misfortune follow good and bad; the third is ensuring that life and death follow laws and statutes; the fourth is being concerned about who is worthy and unworthy and not about who one likes or dislikes; the fifth is being concerned about who is stupid and who is knowledgeable and not about who is blamed or praised; the sixth is relying upon [fixed] standards rather than guesses and conjectures; the seventh is being trustworthy and not deceptive. (25/56/12–13; Liao 1939: 260–61)

There are several ways in which these techniques are tied back into the *dao*. First, these techniques evince an understanding of right and wrong and good and bad, and there is an exhortation on HAN Fei's part to accord with these categories. As what is right and what is good are determined by the *dao* as it relates to human endeavors, the ruler must follow the *dao* in determining rewards and munificence, if his techniques are to be successful.

Second, as with implementing laws, it is necessary to understand human dispositions. If the ruler lacks an understanding of what
p. 308 motivates his ministers, ↳ then he will be incapable of moving beyond the facade created by individual desires (both on the part of the ruler and on the part of officials). The result would be that his techniques will not effectively lead officials to work for the strength and stability of the state.

It is not just the dispositions of human beings in general that are important here, however. Rather, building an effective bureaucratic machine requires an understanding and utilization of the distinct talents and abilities of particular individuals. Like most other early Chinese philosophers, HAN Fei was a meritocrat of sorts. However, HAN Fei's particular conception of what constitutes merit differs significantly from his predecessors. He explicitly argues against thinkers like SHANG Yang, who advocated awarding bureaucratic office based on military achievements, and he is equally disdainful of Confucian proposals for basing assignment of governmental posts on moral qualities. Both of these proposals, he argues, pick out merits that are irrelevant to the tasks officials need to perform.[25]

Of course, this leaves open the question of just what qualities are relevant in appointing an individual to a particular office, and this is not a question that HAN Fei directly answers. However, given the structure of HAN Fei's overall argument, it is presumably tied in with prior performance in similar positions, performance that is evaluated by questioning the correspondence between the job

description of that position and the actual achievements made by the individual while in that position. By developing a structure in which bureaucrats have clearly defined job descriptions, HAN Fei empowers officials with the ability to develop and implement proposals that, if they reach fruition, will achieve the goals of the job description. Merit is determined simply by asking whether what the bureaucrats say they will achieve is what they actually do achieve and whether their task falls under the purview of their particular office. If there is a match, then the bureaucrat is deemed to have merit and rewarded, while if there is a mismatch, then he is punished.[26] The seriousness with which HAN Fei takes this process is illustrated in an oft-quoted vignette:

> [9] In the past, Marquis Zhao of Han became drunk and fell asleep. The Keeper of Caps saw that his ruler was cold and thereupon placed some clothing over him. When the Marquis woke up, he was pleased and asked his attendants, "Who placed clothing over me?" The attendants replied, "The Keeper of Caps." The ruler thereupon punished both the Keeper of Caps and the Keeper of Clothing. He punished the Keeper of Clothing because he took him to have failed his task, and he punished the Keeper of Caps because he had gone beyond his duty. (7/10/1–4; Harris 2023: 335; Watson 2003: 31)

HAN Fei's reasoning is clear. In order to ensure that officials contribute appropriately to the bureaucratic machinery of the state, there need to be fixed standards or success criteria. And, since these success criteria are indicated by the match between claims and achievements, such a technique can only be successful if officials stick to their jobs. In the example above, the Marquis did not wish
p. 309 to sleep uncovered, shivering in the ↳ cold. However, in explaining his reasoning, HAN Fei makes a move reminiscent of later Western defenses of rule consequentialism over act consequentialism, arguing that the harm to the system of allowing such deviations from responsibility outweighs any benefits that might be achieved.

The final concept HAN Fei employs and ties back to the *dao* is *shi* 勢, or "positional power." One of the earliest usages of this term was to describe the advantage afforded by certain terrain in military operations.[27] For HAN Fei, though, the term takes on more abstract overtones, referring now to the power that the ruler has *qua* ruler, the power that this position, with all of its attendant prestige, awesomeness, and leverage, bestows upon *whoever* holds the position, regardless of contingent personal attributes.[28] However, it continues to assume an objective *dao*. Just as when it is used to refer to certain terrain objectively confers a certain power upon the military commander occupying it, the term *shi* in the political realm describes features of the natural world that, HAN Fei argues, have implications for human action:

> Attributing the concept to an earlier thinker, HAN Fei says,
>
> [10] Shen Dao said: "The flying dragon rides the clouds, and the winged snake travels on the mists. But when the clouds are gone and the mists dissipate, the dragon and snake become the same as worms and ants, because they have lost that upon which they were riding. If worthies yield to an unworthy, it is because their authority is slight and their status low. If unworthies put up with submitting to a worthy, it is because his authority is strong and his status exalted. When Yao was a commoner, he could not order [even] three people, but when Jie was the Son of Heaven, he could bring chaos to the world. From this I know that 'positional power' (*shi*) and status are sufficient to rely upon, while worthiness and wisdom are not sufficient to be esteemed. If a crossbow is weak but its arrow flies high, it is because it is pushed forward by the wind. If one is unworthy and yet one's orders are carried out, it is because one has attained the assistance of the masses. When Yao tried to teach the lower classes, the people would not listen to him. [However,] when he came to face south[29] and rule over the world, his orders were carried out, and what he prohibited ceased. From this, we can see that worthiness and knowledge are insufficient to control the masses while positional power (*shi*) and status are sufficient to cause worthies to submit." (40/127/31–128/4; Harris 2023: 348)

As Roger Ames has noted, HAN Fei recognizes that the ruler "rely[ing] exclusively upon his own faculties for maintaining control is not nearly so effective as tapping the collective powers of the empire which are made available to him as a function of his status as ruler" (Ames 1994: 89).[30] This positional power allows the ruler to implement the various techniques HAN Fei advocates and ensure that the laws he promulgates are followed.

It is here that we can see the practical import of HAN Fei's advice to emulate the cosmic *dao*. Appropriately developed, the positional power of the ruler will be similar to that of the *dao* itself. By cultivating an aura of mystery and awe, the ruler helps to set

himself ↳ apart from those over whom he rules in much the same way as he conceives of the *dao* as separate from all that it gave rise to. Given this separation, there is nothing to be done on the part of his people but obey.

Such a separation as well as a direct comparison with the cosmic *dao* also arises in numerous places where HAN Fei tells the ruler to be as resistant to the whims and desires of the people as is the natural world around him. In exercising his positional power and authority he should be as inescapable as thunder and lightning (8/12/11; Watson 2003: 42). Analogies with the natural world continue, with HAN Fei saying,

> [11] In giving awards, the clear-sighted ruler is timely like the seasonal rain, and the people benefit from his favor. In inflicting punishments, he is dreadful like roaring thunder, so that even spirits and sages cannot escape. (5/7/17–18; Harris 2023: 327)

When developed in this fashion, HAN Fei envisions this positional power leading to a situation in which the people will no more expect leniency from the ruler than they would expect to survive were they to plunge through the ice of a remote lake or fall off a sheer rock face. What we have here is a conception of the *dao* of the ruler as being just as fixed as the *dao* of the natural world—a force that must be taken into account when acting and one against which it is useless to remonstrate and toward which it is inappropriate to cast blame.

IV. Conclusion

HAN Fei lays out a well-developed and integrated conception of the *dao* and its impact on both the natural and human worlds. Given the facts about the way that the universe actually is and the way that human beings actually are, it is necessary that members of communities act in particular ways as prerequisites for their survival and flourishing. The political philosophy that HAN Fei develops shows a keen awareness of the *dao* underlying all natural and human processes, and the various methods, laws, and techniques that he advises the ruler to take up and implement are all aimed at ensuring that the members of the community act in the ways that will best ensure the community's survival, particularly in instances in which the members would otherwise be disinclined to so act.

HAN Fei uses his conception of the *dao* as the basis for constructing a mechanical bureaucratic and legal Leviathan to which the ruler plays the role of the phantom oiler.[31] Emulating the cosmic *dao* while at the same time tying all his tools back to this *dao*, the ruler remains a mysterious figure, one whose image is made all the more awesome by the inevitability of his reactions to those within the state whose actions do not accord with his conception of the *dao*.[32]

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Notes

1. **Two recent collections of essays, Cheng (2011) and Goldin (2013), have done much to further our understanding of Han Fei, as does Pines (2024).**
2. **Hence the title of A. C. Graham's famous introduction to Chinese philosophy, *Disputers of the Tao*. See Graham (1989).**
3. **For example, Goldin (2013: 14–18) argues that HAN Fei's usage of the term is contradictory and lays out several possible explanations for these contradictions. Zhang (1992, 2004), on the other hand, tries to provide an analysis of HAN Fei's usage of the term that he believes will allow us better to understand HAN Fei's broader philosophy. Song (2010) as well tries to interpret HAN Fei's philosophy as arising from an understanding of the *dao* and a modeling of politics on nature.**
4. **All references to the Chinese text are according to the numbering system of the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) *Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series*, in the format: chapter/page/line. See Lau and Chen (2000). All translations are my own, and references are given to the translations by Harris (2023) and Watson (2003) when available. Due to its numerous inaccuracies, references to the complete translation by Liao (1939, 1959) are only provided when no other translation is available and referenced by volume and page.**

5. The character that I translate as "potency" is 德 *dé*, which is often rendered "virtue." For HAN Fei, it lacks the moral overtones that the term "virtue" often gives rise to, but it can be thought of as a virtue in the sense of a characteristic potency (and in this way, it is similar to the Latin *virtus*).

6. Note that while the Chinese character for "pattern," *lǐ* 理, has the same pronunciation in Mandarin Chinese as ritual *lǐ* 禮, they are two separate concepts.

7. Indeed, certain scholars have attempted to paint HAN Fei as borrowing Daoist metaphysics to undergird his political thought. See, for example, Wang and Chang (1986). For more on the *Shenzi Fragments*, attributed to SHEN Dao 愼到, see Harris (2015, 2016). There are also parallels to ideas found in the recently excavated texts often attributed to the *Huang-Lao* tradition. See Yates (1997). We may also see in this and other passages the influence of Xunzi's more naturalistic conception of Heaven.

8. For a discussion of the *Laozi* in the *HAN Feizi*, including the latter's two commantaries on the former, see Harris and Hutton (forthcoming).

9. See Zhang (2004: 5–6) for more discussion on this point. Indeed, this is a typical move for HAN Fei. He seems to, for example, accept many of Xunzi's premises on human nature, and yet the conclusions he draws from these premises differ drastically from Xunzi's own.

10. Such a usage appears throughout the text, including Chapter 5, appropriately named "The Way of the Ruler," and the well-known Chapters 49 ("The Five Vermin") and 50 ("On the Illustrious Schools of Thought"). See Harris (2023).

11. See, for example, Chapter 16, "Three Precautions" (Liao 1939: 142–45) and Chapter 44, "On Assumers" (Liao 1959: 216–29).

12. Found in Chapter 10, "The Ten Faults" (Watson 2003: 49–72), and Chapter 16, "Three Precautions" (Liao 1939: 142–45), among others.

13. Found throughout, including in Chapter 19, "On Pretentions and Heresies" (Liao 1939: 156–68), Chapter 30, "Inner Congeries of Sayings, The Upper Series" (Liao 1939: 281–310), and Chapter 48, "Eight Canons" (Liao 1959: 258–74).

14. Indeed, while there are many differences, this view is similar to aspects of Aquinas's conception of law. Just as natural law, human law, and divine law are all dependent upon ↳ the eternal law, so too are these various limited notions of the *dao* dependent upon the cosmic *dao*.

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15. Of course, these two categories are not mutually exclusive.

16. See HAN Fei's discussion of the "Nester" and the "Kindler" in Chapter 49, "The Five Vermin" (Harris 2023: 357).

17. It could be argued that this passage implies that right and wrong depend on what rewards and punishments are stipulated, *regardless* of their source. On such an account, if the ruler established rewards for raping and pillaging, then raping and pillaging are right. If he established punishments for taking care of one's parents, then taking care of one's parents is wrong. However, such a reading ignores the fuller context of this passage and others such as passage [6] that indicate that it is the *dao* that gives rise to the laws that are the standards for right and wrong. For a fuller defense of this reading, see Harris (2011).

18. In declining the presidency of Israel, Einstein recognized that an understanding of the natural world was insufficient for the task of politics, saying that his study of the "objective world" ill-prepared him for dealing properly with people.

19. For more on HAN Fei's conception of human nature, see Flanagan and Hu (2011), Harris (2011, 2013), Bárcenas (2012), and Sato (2013).

20. HAN Fei does discuss a range of individuals whose natures were extremely benevolent as well as those whose natures were extremely violent. However, he makes two points about these people. First, they are very rare, and second, their natures are still fairly stable. It is not that the extremely benevolent became that way through any process. Rather, they were always that way. As such, it makes no sense to try to change others so that they have a comparable level of benevolence.

21. In one particularly interesting passage, HAN Fei ridicules the effectiveness of moral transformation by remarking that

even Kongzi (Confucius), the greatest sage the world has ever seen, was only able to attract some 70 followers, and among them, none but Kongzi himself was truly virtuous. The implication is that most people's natures are such that they do not have the necessary potential to become virtuous. See 49/146/27–147/2, Harris (2023: 361).

22. For a more detailed argument along these lines, see Ivanhoe (2011a).

23. See, for example, 5/7/1–2, Harris (2023: 326), Watson (2003: 16–17).

24. See Mengzi 6A10.

25. For more discussion of HAN Fei's conception of merit, see Harris (2020).

26. For a more detailed analysis of HAN Fei's ideas on matching proposals and results, see Creel (1970), Makeham (1990), and Levi (1993).

27. Perhaps the most famous instances arise in Sunzi's *Art of War*. See Ivanhoe (2011b).

28. For an excellent introduction to the history of this term, see Chapter 3, "*Shih* 勢 (Strategic Advantage/Political Purchase)," in Ames (1994: 65–107). See also Bárcenas (2013) for a discussion in reference to HAN Fei.

29. In traditional China, the position the ruler took in the court was one facing south, so to say that someone faces south is to say that they are the ruler.

30. This is in very clear contrast with early Confucian views about how a ruler's individual *de* (potency/power/virtue) is what sways the people and leads them to develop themselves. See, for example, *Analects* 2.1 and 12.17–12.19.

31. For a discussion of the ruler as the phantom oiler of a machine, see Ivanhoe (2011a).

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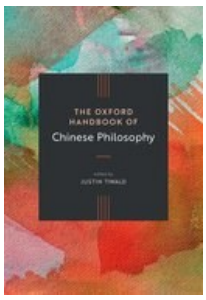

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CHAPTER

16 When Buddha Nature Was Not Buddha Nature: *Fo'xing*, *Shen*, and the Birth of a Universal Mind in Early Medieval China

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Abstract

This chapter is an attempt to integrate Chinese Buddhism into the broader Chinese intellectual milieu. It traces the critical but neglected role played by the debate on Buddha Nature among Chinese Buddhists in the birth of a universal mind in the early medieval Chinese intellectual discourse. The chapter argues that the early medieval Chinese debates about the status of *shen* (spirit or soul), the right cause of *fo'xing* (Buddha Nature), and their relationship with the mind led to a synthesis of a new universal mind. Such a mind is luminous, originally pure, metaphysical, universal, spiritual, absolute, and indestructible. The grand conception of mind is radically different from a much more modest classical notion of heart-mind. This universal mind would gradually occupy a critical space in the subsequent Chinese intellectual history, of which Chinese Buddhism and neo-Confucianism were integral parts.

Keywords: Buddha Nature, fo'xing, spirit, shen, Emperor Wu of Liang, One Mind, universal mind
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
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I. Introduction

Chinese Buddhism is an awkward scholarly object: it is perceived in some corners of the scholarly community as neither Chinese (Confucian/Daoist) nor Buddhist (Indian). Such an awkward status is reflected in the tension in the scholarly approaches to the study of Chinese Buddhism:

> The modern study of medieval Chinese religion has been divided broadly between two camps: the sinologists and the buddhologists. While the former often ignored Buddhism, the latter tended to ignore everything but…. Consequently, when seeking historical and intellectual antecedents for Chinese Buddhist phenomena, they tended to look toward India

> rather than toward non-Buddhist China. There were, needless to say, important exceptions to this division of labor…. But for the most part, Anglo-American studies of Chinese Buddhism, particularly the Buddhism of the clerisy, have been dominated by buddhological models. (Sharf 2002: 1)

In other words, Chinese Buddhism fits neither the Sinological nor the Buddhological trope neatly. Compounding this problem right now is the fact that the study of Chinese Buddhism lacks a grand narrative to ground the discourse, serving as the paradigm. The old narrative of "Buddhist conquest of China" (e.g., E. Zürcher 1959/2007) or "Chinese transformation of Buddhism" (e.g., K. Ch'en
p. 318 1973) has been called into question due to their inevitable reifications of what is Buddhist and what is Chinese in such ↳ broad strokes, but new narratives have not yet emerged. Hence the study of (medieval) Chinese Buddhism is currently mired in that ambiguity.

In light of such circumstances, it should come as no surprise that Buddha Nature (*fó'xìng*佛性), a central doctrine in all major schools of Chinese Buddhism, is a problematic scholarly object for Buddhist studies. Buddha Nature is usually understood as referring to the possibility of sentient beings to attain enlightenment or become a Buddha. However, there is a great ideal of ambiguity in the concept. First of all, there is a terminological disjunction between the Chinese term *fo'xing* and its putative Sanskrit equivalent. It might come as a surprise to some that there is no obvious Sanskrit equivalent to *fo'xing*, even though the scholarly consensus points to *buddhadhātu*. According to TAKASAKI Jikidō, *buddhadhātu* has two meanings: "(1) the nature (*dhātu=dharmatā*) of the Buddha, thus equivalent to the term *dharmakāya*, and (2) the cause (*dhātu=hetu*) of the Buddha" (quoted in King 1991: 5). However, the Sanskrit term that is usually associated with Buddha Nature is *tathāgatagarbha* (*rúlái zàng* 如來藏), the embryo of the Buddha. This terminological ambiguity has complicated the effort to delineate the development of Buddha Nature in Chinese Buddhism, as it pulls together various discrete, though somewhat related, ideas from Indian Buddhism without acknowledging so. In Chinese Buddhism, *rulai zang* was quickly eclipsed by *fo'xing*, which became the singular term for expressing the idea of sentient beings' potential to be enlightened.

Second, despite the presence of the idea of *tathāgatagarbha* in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, such as *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* (*Rulai zang jing* 如來藏經), *Śrīmālādevī Sūtra* (*Shengman jing* 勝鬘經) and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (*Dabo niepan jing* 大般涅槃經, hereafter *MPNS*), and so on, it never achieved the kind of doctrinal prominence within Indian Buddhism enjoyed by other concepts like emptiness (*śūnyatā*; Ch. *kong* 空) in the scholarly construct of Mahāyāna Buddhist orthodoxy. Furthermore, the *MPNS*'s characterization of Buddha Nature as permanent, blissfulness, *ātman*, and purity (*cháng lè wǒ jìng* 常樂我淨), especially its use of the term *ātman* rejected in early Buddhist teachings, has led to suspicions among some modern scholars about the nature of the doctrine. Consequently, the study of Buddha Nature often starts with a defense or justification about why it should be regarded as Buddhist at all, given its perceived deviation from the established Buddhist orthodoxy, and some scholars simply reject Buddha Nature as Buddhist.[1]

Much of the controversy surrounding Buddha Nature in modern scholarship can be attributed to the scholarly focus on the doctrine while less attention has been paid to its history. Doctrinal questions tend to focus on the meanings of Buddha Nature, its significance in the Buddhist deliberation on the possibility of awakening (especially pertaining to the question of whether or not all sentient beings—sometimes even nonsentient beings—possess Buddha Nature), and its conflict with the "orthodox" Buddhist inclination towards nonreification, represented by the teachings of no-self, dependent origination, and emptiness. Such an approach to Buddha Nature is framed within a narrowly constructed Buddhological framework that tends to privilege some version of Indian Buddhism, at least implicitly, as normative and to regard Buddha Nature and its development in Chinese Buddhism as distortive. As such, it
p. 319 does not, in Robert Sharf's ↳ words, take Chinese Buddhism seriously, as it does not take Chinese Buddhism(s) on its own terms.

This chapter will eschew questions concerning Buddha Nature's doctrinal orthodoxy, which was itself a construct largely resulting from the scholarly reification of certain aspects of Indian Buddhism while conveniently brushing aside the extraordinary diversity of Buddhist teachings. Rather, I will seek historical and intellectual antecedents of Buddha Nature within indigenous Chinese sources, taking a cue from Sharf, instead of only from Indian Buddhist texts. My effort here is guided by the following questions: What problems did the notion of Buddha Nature address in early medieval China? Why were those problems important to the Chinese intellectuals at the time? In what ways did the idea of Buddha Nature address those problems, and in what ways were those problems themselves transformed due to the Buddhist participation? I would argue that Buddha Nature was appropriated as an important conceptual resource to participate in the ongoing Chinese debate about spirit/soul (*shén* 神) and that the synthesis between *shen* and

Buddha Nature and its locating in the mind would lead to the birth of a radically new conception of mind, a universal mind, in the subsequent Chinese deliberation on the nature of the mind (*xīnxìng* 心性), crucial to both Chinese Buddhists and the emerging neo-Confucians.

II. Buddha Nature in Early Medieval China (Third–Sixth Centuries ce)

Early medieval China, following the collapse of Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), was a chaotic and traumatic episode in Chinese history, but also one of its most creative periods rivaling the pre-Qin early China period. The era following the collapse of Han is known in Chinese history as the Six Dynasties (*Liuchao* 六朝 220–589 CE), the latter part of which is called the Southern and Northern Dynasties (*Nanbeichao* 南北朝 420–589 CE). This North–South divide was due to occupation of Northern China by non-Han ethnic groups and the fleeing of the Han elite to the South following the fall of Western Jin (*Xijin* 西晉 265–316 CE), a short-lived unified dynasty after Han. Non-Han minority groups established a succession of dynasties in the North, collectively known as the Northern Dynasties. Southern Dynasties were created by the émigré Han elites fleeing the occupied North. This divide also created a cultural chasm between the North and the South that would be relevant to the development of Chinese Buddhism during this formative period. Our discussion on Buddha Nature will focus on the development in the Southern Dynasties due to the lively debates going on there on this subject.

As TANG Yongtong 湯用彤, the best-known Chinese intellectual historian of early medieval China, famously observes, an important intellectual shift was taking place from cosmology to ontology during this period (Tang 2001: 43–44). The preceding Han Dynasty
p. 320 saw the flourishing of yin-yang cosmology and speculation about the origin of ↳ the cosmos and the correlativity between the natural and the human domains that characterize the official Confucian discourse, articulated by thinkers like DONG Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE). During the early medieval period, the prime intellectual energy moved to the speculation of the foundation or basis of the unsettled and unsettling reality, namely, Being/Nonbeing (*yǒuwú* 有無) and spontaneity (*zìrán* 自然), with WANG Bi 王弼 (226–249 CE) and GUO Xiang 郭象 (252?–312 CE) as the leading figures. Such a shift to ontological speculations created a receptive intellectual ambiance for the incoming Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, especially the central teaching of emptiness due to its apparent, if misunderstood, resemblance with the notion of Nonbeing (*wú* 無) in *xuanxue* (玄學 "learning of the mysterious" which is sometimes translated as Neo-Daoism).

This ontological turn also coincided with a shift to spiritual transcendence during that period. In time of political disunity, ideological confusion and intellectual chaos, Buddhist teaching, such as *nirvāṇa* and *dhyāna* practices, made itself known by its seductive speculation on the other-worldly transcendence. As Whalen Lai observes, a "rumor" of transcendence was registered on the intellectual scene in early medieval China: "an awareness of a new and higher reality, a profound inner self, and a broader community, something not known before" (Lai 2009: 329). This is reflected in the intensified imaginations, both elite and popular, about transcendent beings (*xian* 仙) who have allegedly overcome death and ascended to the divine realm, partially fueled by the intense competition between Daoists' and Buddhists' rival accounts of miracle feats performed by their respective adepts.[2] Buddhism was, at least initially, perceived to contribute to such pursuits of interest for those Chinese on how to achieve long life or even immortality.

The teaching of Buddha Nature was introduced to China in such an environment. Many of the discussions on Buddha Nature during the Southern Dynasties were directly or indirectly spurred by the translation and transmission of the Mahāyāna *MPNS* wherein Buddha Nature is a major subject. The *MPNS*'s discussion of Buddha Nature is multidimensional and multilayered. It covers topics ranging from the necessity of faith, the nature of the Buddha, characteristics of the Buddha, causes of enlightenment, as well as the availability of enlightenment, and so on. Much of the early medieval Chinese debate on Buddha Nature tracks the various deliberations in the *MPNS*. One of the heatedly contested topics had to do with right or direct cause (*zhèngyīn* 正因) of Buddha Nature, following the discussions in the *MPNS*.

Jizang 吉藏 (549–623 CE), the founder of the Chinese Madhyamika School (Sanlun Zong 三論宗), put together a list of 11 positions on the right cause of the Buddha Nature in his *Mysterious Discourse of Mahāyāna* (*Dacheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論), which is a major source for modern scholarship on the early medieval Buddha Nature debate. The 11 interpretations are: sentient beings as the right

cause, six elements (five *skandha*s plus the provisional person), the mind, perpetual activities of the mind, avoiding suffering and seeking bliss, true spirit, *ālayavijñāna* and the inherently pure mind, future result, principle of attaining Buddhahood, *Tathatā*, and
p. 321 the first principle of emptiness (Koseki 1977: 358–61). From a conventional Buddhological perspective, it should be clear that 10 ↳ of the 11 causes are variations of some standard items in the Buddhist conceptual universe. The only exception is true spirit or soul (*zhēnshén* 真神). Something interesting must have been going on at the time in order for the concept of *shen* 神 to be "slipped" into the list.

Indeed, Jizang's list tells us that there were at least two separate, though related, philosophical disputations pertaining to the right cause of Buddha Nature in the Southern Dynasties. One was conducted more within the Buddhist circle wherein the issue was focused on the right cause of Buddhahood or enlightenment. The other was part of a long-standing indigenous Chinese debate on the nature of spirit/soul, its relationship with body, and whether it outlasts the body or not. The participants of this latter debate were by no means limited to the Buddhist circle. In fact, the idea of Buddha Nature was appropriated by some participants as an additional conceptual resource. I argue that the role played by Buddha Nature in this latter debate would shape the intellectual trajectory of the subsequent Chinese deliberations of the mind.

III. Early Medieval Chinese Debate on *Shen*

One of the central Buddhist teachings is the idea of karma. The appropriation of karma into the Chinese spiritual universe is itself a fascinating story we cannot get into here. Suffice it to say that once karma was embraced by the Chinese, changes were needed within the indigenous Chinese conceptual universe to accommodate this new element. Since karma presupposes some form of existence beyond a single life span, a subject that had not been a central Chinese intellectual preoccupation, the incorporation of karma into the Chinese conceptual universe forced the Chinese intellectuals to contemplate such a possibility more directly and explicitly. In time, the disputation on karma would feed into the long-standing Chinese debate on *shen* during this period.

As Yuet Keung LO summarizes,

> the idea of *shen* in pre-Buddhist China was understood as a form of individuated primal force which was considered to be psychophysical. As such, *shen* was considered the spiritual part in man [in] contrast to the purely physical. It was the principle of life and accounted for the principle of thought and action in man. Since the individuated primal force was deemed perishable, most Han thinkers tended to dismiss the idea of an immortal soul. Consequently, *shen* was given no supremacy over the physical body. Coordination rather than subordination characterized the relationship between the two entities. (Lo 1991: 144)

It was the Chinese Buddhists who elevated the status of *shen* and rendered it indestructible, due to the need to account for some form
p. 322 of continued existence after death, as the ↳ law of karma dictates. In fact, *shen* became so identified with the Buddhists that many early medieval thinkers regarded it as an exclusively Buddhist concept.

Given the centrality of no-self (Sk.: *anātman*; Pali: *anatta*) in Buddhism, it is rather curious that any Buddhist could have advocated the indestructibility of soul/spirit as the carrier of karmic retribution after death and the achiever of awakening. However, the early Buddhist teaching of no-self was not part of the mainstream Chinese Buddhist conceptual universe until much later (Zürcher 2007: 11–12). Instead, belief in karma and transmigration as well as the *dhyāna* practice were the signature "trademarks" of Buddhism at the time. When the Chinese Buddhists were grappling with the possibility of transmigration, they came to believing that karma across several life spans necessarily presupposes a carrier. In time, the indigenous notion of *shen* was appropriated to assume such a role. Anybody familiar with the Buddhist "orthodoxy" of no-self would probably cringe at that development, but such was the historical contour of Chinese Buddhism. Let us examine a particularly consequential debate on *shen* that took place toward the end of the Southern Dynasties.

The ideas of karma and transmigration were gaining wide currency, especially among the elites. There the appeal was more about the justificatory function of karma for the way things were in the world than about the overcoming of karmic cycle. For example, XIAO Ziliang 蕭子良 (460–494 CE), the prince of Jingling during the Qi Dynasty who was known for hosting salons for a group of literary

figures, was using karma to explain the different social statuses and wealth, clearly demonstrating the justificatory convenience of the notion of karma. Two people in that group, FAN Zhen 范縝 (c. 450–515 CE) and XIAO Yan 蕭衍 (464–549 CE), would come to define the parameters of the ensuing debate on *shen*. FAN Zhen rejected XIAO Ziliang's position on karma while XIAO Yan, who would become the founder of the succeeding Liang Dynasty, converted to Buddhism and fully embraced the notion of karma. XIAO Yan's injection into the debate elevated the stake to a much higher level, at least among the political and cultural elites, effectively ending the debate as it was previously configured. However, the *intellectual* consequence of XIAO Yan's participation in the debate has not been properly appreciated.

FAN Zhen is the author of a famous essay, *The Treatise on the Extinction of the Spirit* (*Shenmie lun* 神滅論).[3] There FAN Zhen takes on the Buddhist notion of *shen* and argues against an indestructible soul/spirit. He formulates his arguments as a response to an imagined interlocutor. The following is a brief summary of his arguments.

FAN Zhen starts by laying out two basic premises for his argument, namely, that body and *shen* are one, and the body is ontologically prior to *shen*. Therefore, when the body dies, so does the soul as the two are one. He describes the body as the soul's material base and soul as the functioning of the body, invoking the conceptual trope of substance/function (*tǐyòng* 體用, even though Fan uses a different term—essence [*zhì* 質]—for *tǐ*) made famous by WANG Bi. For FAN Zhen, body and soul are not separate; they are different names for the same thing. To make this point, he compares the *shen*–body relationship to the sharpness–knife relationship. That is, just as sharpness disappears when the knife disappears, *shen* dies when the body dies.

p. 323 The opponent then challenges him with a question on how to explain a dead person's body, with the apparent assumption that body–*shen* dualism has the explanatory advantage. That is, in the common understanding, when a person dies, the body remains but consciousness departs; this, for the opponent, is the evidence that a person consists of two separate substances, body and *shen*. However, FAN Zhen rejects this by maintaining that living body and dead body are actually two different kinds of bodies. That is, a living human body is made of sentient matter (instead of insentient matter plus consciousness) and a dead body insentient matter, like a tree, even though Fan does not explain how those two kinds of bodies are related empirically. When pressed with the question about how to differentiate sensation from thought if *shen* and body are the same (with the assumption that *shen*–body dualism again has the explanatory advantage by associating thought with *shen* and sensation with body), FAN Zhen answers that the two are simply two different functions of the body, with sensation being the superficial one and thought the profound one.

The last argument has to do with the justification for the practice of ancestral worship. When asked about the rationale for ancestral worship if *shen* dies with the body with the implication that ancestral worship is the worship of ancestral spirits, FAN Zhen argues that questions about spirits is beyond our comprehension and refuses to indulge in a fruitless speculation. This echoes the long-standing Confucian reluctance on the speculation of spirits, famously expressed in the *Analects* 7.21: "Confucius had nothing to say about uncanny phenomena, feats of power, disorderliness, and the spirits." For FAN Zhen, a good Confucian, the focus should be on the educational utility of ancestral worship itself, rather than the ontological foundation for the practice. However, ontological questions were precisely what the Buddhists were interested in.

At the end of the treatise, FAN Zhen spells out what he considers to be the negative consequences of the belief in an indestructible soul. Such a belief, in FAN Zhen's eyes, undermines morals and encourages donation to temples at the expense of taking care of one's kin and the poor. Furthermore, the talk of Heaven and hell confuses people, alienates family and friends, enfeebles the military, and squanders treasures. Clearly it is these considerations that motivated FAN Zhen to compose the treatise.

It is hard not to be impressed by the cogency and power of FAN Zhen's argument in *The Treatise on the Extinction of the Spirit*, especially from a contemporary perspective. However, FAN Zhen's effort was not quite in tune with the zeitgeist of the Southern Dynasties, namely, the intellectual shift to ontological speculation and spiritual transcendence. Such a zeitgeist became especially potent when it had the imperial authority behind it.

XIAO Yan 蕭衍 (464–549 CE), the famous Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502–549 CE), sometimes regarded as the Chinese version of the famous Indian Buddhist monarch *Aśoka* 阿育王 (r. 273–232 BCE), was alarmed by FAN Zhen's contentions and decided to inject himself into the debate. Given his political power and unequivocal support of Buddhism after his conversion, Emperor Wu had an enormous influence on the subsequent development of Chinese Buddhism that cannot be overestimated, even

p. 324 though there is a lack of detailed study and acknowledgment of specific ways he shaped ↳ the subsequent development of Chinese intellectual endeavors, other than some general recognition of his political impact on the development of Buddhism during his time.

IV. Xiao Yan's Synthesis of *Shen* and Buddha Nature

Emperor Wu wrote two essays on the topic of *shen*, "The Great Liang Emperor Orders His Ministers to Respond to the *Treatise on the Extinction of the Spirit*" (*Daliang huangdi chida chenxia shenmie lun* 大梁皇帝敕答臣下神滅論) and "On Establishing the Luminous Spirit as What Attains Buddhahood" (*Li shenming chengfo yiji* 立神明成佛義記). The first one is a preface to the collection of essays Emperor Wu solicited from his ministers to refute FAN Zhen's *The Treatise on the Extinction of the Spirit*, whereas the second piece is the emperor's meditation on the relationship between *shen* and Buddha Nature. Judging from the terminologies and the issues raised in the two essays, we can see that the first, short, essay was argued on Confucian ground and the second, longer, piece was presented more on Buddhist ground.

In the first piece, XIAO Yan tries to argue for the indestructible soul by citing two references from the Jiyi 祭義 chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the ultimate authority in the classical Confucian discourse on rituals. Both references are about the practice of ancestral worship, which is the single most important Chinese religious practice over the ages. According to the *Liji*, only a filial son can perform a sacrificial ritual to his departed parents, and he can see their spirits he prays to after three days of intense ritual contemplation.[4] Ritual contemplation (*zhāi* 齋, purification and abstention in preparation for a ritual) here refers specifically to the practice of five reminiscences of one's departed parents: reminiscing about their abode, their bodily and verbal expressions, their intentions, their enjoyments, and their passions. According to the *Liji*, three days of *zhai* practice would enable the person to see the one he has been reminiscing about.

Clearly XIAO Yan's argument is that without ancestral spirits, the practice of ancestor worship would become meaningless. In XIAO Yan's mind, an indestructible soul provides the best raison d'être for ancestral worship whose significance FAN Zhen could not have questioned. In other words, for XIAO Yan, the Buddhist notion of indestructible soul makes explicit what is implicit in the most important traditional Chinese religious practice. However, as we have seen previously, FAN Zhen regards such an effort spurious since, for him, the point of ancestral worship is its efficacy for moral education rather than grounds for pointless speculations about the status of the ancestral spirits. Due to their divergent interests, it was unlikely that either side would prevail over the other. As Tom De Rauw points out perceptively, Emperor Wu's tactics in settling the issue by forcing his ministers to take sides effectively
p. 325 shut down the opposite side that ↳ advocated the destructibility of *shen* (De Rauw 2008: 122). To be fair to XIAO Yan, such a method was far gentler than brutally suppressing a dissenting view, as he could have easily done as an emperor.

XIAO Yan's second piece, "On Establishing the Luminous Spirit (*shenming*) as What Attains Buddhahood,"[5] was meant to shed light on key teachings in the *MPNS*, according to SHEN Ji 沈績, who was asked by XIAO Yan to write a commentary on the emperor's essay. XIAO Yan's essay describes the possibility of enlightenment and the universality of Buddha Nature by defending the indestructibility of *shen* and its inevitability for enlightenment.

XIAO Yan starts with an emphasis on the importance of faith in the universality of Buddha Nature (*à la* SHEN Ji's commentary) and right understanding as the basis for such a faith. Then the text shifts to the ground of faith and understanding, namely, the luminous spirit, which does not perish and "will inevitably return to the mysterious goal (of enlightenment)" (Lai trans. 1981a: 171). "The mysterious goal is one with the ultimate and is unchanging. The spirit (in its function) cannot, however, help changing" (Lai trans. 1981a: 171). Here XIAO Yan appeals to the trope of substance/function (*tiyong* 體用) to explain the relationship between the luminous spirit and its functions, with the former being permanent and the latter constantly changing:

> As the mind functions by clinging onto the external conditions (*ālambana*), consciousness will differ from moment to moment. If so, consciousness will disintegrate with the (disintegrating) phenomena. What entity can then attain enlightenment? (Lai trans. 1981a: 171)

XIAO Yan insists that without a permanent entity, there would be nobody that reaches Buddhahood, similar to the Chinese Buddhist belief in the necessity of *shen* to make sense of karma and transmigration mentioned previously. In other words, XIAO Yan applied the same logic for a substratum of transmigration to enlightenment, arguing that there has to be some agent that realizes Buddhahood. Furthermore, as we will see immediately, XIAO Yan argues that it is the same *shen* that underlies both transmigration and enlightenment. That is, there needs to be a subject who transmigrates and who is enlightened.

Intriguingly, in the quoted passage XIAO Yan's terminology shifts from the luminous spirit and its functions prevalent in the earlier part of the essay to the mind and its functions (consciousness) here, subtly equating the luminous spirit with the mind. This is how XIAO Yan links the luminous spirit to the mind, as he would do by quoting the *MPNS* in the next passage: "The mind is the basic cause. It will finally bear the fruit of enlightenment" (Lai trans. 1981a: 171). This is XIAO Yan's position in his participation in the Buddhist side of the debate on the causes of enlightenment.

The next segment of the text goes into the theme of the incongruity between ignorance and enlightenment and between the good and the bad. XIAO Yan argues that it is the luminous spirit qua mind that serves as the ground for both ignorance and enlightenment, both the good and the bad:

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> "Non-enlightenment, by a sudden turn, is transformed into enlightenment." Here the principle can be found. How? The mind is the basis of the functions. The basis is one; the functions are many. The many go through life and death (*saṃsāra*) naturally. The nature of the one basis, however, does not change. The one basis is the *wu-ming shen-ming*. (Lai trans. 1981a: 172)

Here again, XIAO Yan resorts to the *tiyong* trope to explain the relationship between the basis and the functions. Interestingly, he mentions both *wúmíng shénmíng* (無明神明) and the mind as the basis of vicissitudes of life and death. *Wuming shenming* is a combination of two words, *wuming* (ignorance; Sk. *avidya*)—a standard Buddhist term—and *shenming* (luminous spirit)—XIAO Yan's term for indestructible spirit. Together it can be translated as either ignorant spirit or pre-enlightened spirit.[6]

XIAO Yan's equivocation between spirit and mind as the unchanging substratum of both ignorant and enlightened states is quite telling in terms of a subtle textual shift toward the mind. This shift to the mind becomes more pronounced toward the end of the essay when the reference to *shenming* is completely dropped off and the mind is now recognized as the locus of enlightenment. Accordingly, the mind, once it recognizes how its different functions and dependency on the external objects give rise to confusion and ignorance, comes to the realization that it is indeed itself the Buddha Nature and is therefore enlightened.

This analysis of XIAO Yan's text demonstrates that there is a synthesis of the notions of *shen*, Buddha Nature, and the mind in his writing such that the mind would eventually take on attributes of *shen* and Buddha Nature. In other words, XIAO Yan's writing clearly indicates a shift toward a model of the mind that is infused with qualities of *shen* and Buddha Nature, namely, spirituality, indestructibility, and universality. In this connection, it is worth pointing out that XIAO Yan's argument in the first piece in defense of the indestructibility of *shen* implies individuated ancestral spirits whereas his presentation in the second piece suggests a universal spirit that would realize its Buddha Nature. Furthermore, since *shen* was regarded as the underlying substratum of ignorance and enlightenment, the good and the bad, and so on, the locating of *shen* in the mind would eventually render the mind such a substratum.

XIAO Yan's text shows enough terminological ambivalence between *shenming* (luminous spirit) and *xin* (mind) to indicate its transitional role in the larger intellectual shift from *shen* to the mind that was underway at the time. Because of his powerful influence during his reign, politically, intellectually, and culturally, XIAO Yan clearly played an important role in such a critical shift. For example, SHEN Yue 沈約 (441–513 CE), a famous poet at the time who was one of XIAO Yan's ministers, wrote several essays echoing and developing the emperor's argument about *shen*. In his detailed study,[7] Yuet Keung LO argues that SHEN Yue's pieces constitute a clear epistemic shift toward the human mind. Whalen Lai, in his study of SHEN Yue, credits Shen as the one who "defused the old, perhaps futile, debate on 'body vs. soul' " and "turned the investigation toward more fruitful ends, such that the debate on the immortal soul which peaked at his time also declined soon afterwards" (Lai 1981b: 154). For Lai, speculation about
p. 327 the immortality of the soul/ ↳ spirit is "dead-end" (154.) since "[t]he problem, after all, is man and not spirit" (154). As a result, the

Tang Buddhists were no longer worrying about this "passé issue" (154) and moved onto other more fruitful discussions, such as mind and human/Buddha nature (*xin xing* 心性) during the Tang and Song dynasties (138).

However, Lai's analysis drastically underestimates the way the debate on *shen* shaped the subsequent Chinese Buddhist debate on the mind (and beyond). Rather than simply dropping *shen* in favor of mind as the locus of Buddha Nature and enlightenment, later Chinese Buddhists' understanding of the mind was now a mind that is infused with characteristics previously attributed to *shen* and Buddha Nature, in terms of its spirituality, universality, permanence, deludability, and enlightenability. In other words, *shen* and Buddha Nature would be subsumed under a new conception of the mind as the result of the debate on *shen* and Buddha Nature, such that the mind now takes on features that were attributed to *shen* and Buddha Nature. We see the convergence of the three concepts, *shen*, Buddha Nature, and mind, during this period with a critical terminological shift to the mind. This convergence would culminate in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* (*Dacheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論, henceforth *AFM*), to which we turn.

V. One Mind in the *AFM* and the Emergence of a New Conception of Mind

The *AFM* appeared toward the end of the Six Dynasties (c. 550 CE), right around the time of XIAO Yan's death (549 CE). According to the traditional account, it was authored by Aśvaghoṣa (*Maming* 馬鳴, c. 80–150 CE) and translated by Paramārtha (*Zhendi* 真諦, 499–569 CE), although both have been challenged.[8] The extraordinary influence of *AFM* in Chinese Buddhism is evidenced in its being appropriated by virtually all schools of Chinese Buddhism in propagating their teachings.

Much of the modern scholarship on the *AFM* has focused on its questionable authorship and the corollary issue of its origin (whether it was composed in India or China),[9] its teaching of the One Mind, and its importance within various Chinese Buddhist schools. The scholarly consensus is that the *AFM* was probably composed in China toward the end of the early medieval period, although not necessarily by a Chinese author. Curiously, however, the question concerning the origin of the concept of One Mind has largely eluded the scholarly attention. Since One Mind is not a standard concept that has a clear Indian Buddhist antecedent, its origin is worth investigating. I propose that the peculiar notion of One Mind in the *AFM* points to a Chinese source, especially an important but neglected role played by Emperor Wu of Liang, thus lending support to the scholarly consensus on the Chinese origin of the *AFM*.

In the text, the One Mind refers to the mind of sentient beings that appropriates all worldly and otherworldly entities.[10] In its
p. 328 thusness this Mind demonstrates the nature of the absolute reality while in its worldly aspect (literally arising, cessation, causal and
↳ conditional, *shēngmiè yīnyuán xiàng* 生滅因緣相) it exhibits three characteristics of the absolute reality, namely, substance, qualities, and functions (*tǐxiàngyòng* 體相用).[11] In terms of substance, all entities are equally identical with the absolute reality;[12] in terms of qualities, the *tathāgatagarbha* is complete with infinitely excellent merits and virtues;[13] and in terms of functions, the absolute reality can give rise to all worldly and otherworldly good causes and fruits.[14]

As Yoshito HAKEDA summarizes,

> In the author's system of thought, the all-inclusive Reality, the unconditional Absolute, is called Suchness. When it engages the realm of being, it is expressed in terms of Mind, i.e., One Mind, the Mind of sentient being, the essential nature of Mind, etc. The Mind, therefore, represents the Absolute as it is expressed in the temporal order. The Mind necessarily contains within itself two orders or aspects—the transcendental and the phenomenal, the universal and the particular, the infinite and the finite, the static and the dynamic, the sacred and the profane, the Absolute and the relative, and so forth. The Absolute order, therefore, does not exist apart from the relative order; rather, they differ epistemologically but not ontologically. Man is presented as being located at the intersection of these opposing orders. The state of man, who belongs intrinsically to the Absolute order and yet in actuality remains in the phenomenal, finite, and profane order, is expressed in terms of the *Tathāgatagarbha* or "Matrix of Tathāgata." (Hakeda 1967: 12–13)

Clearly this One Mind does not refer to the mental faculty of an individual but, rather, a metaphysical, universal mind that is itself absolute but gives rise to dual aspects of reality, such as the transcendent and the worldly, the sacred and the profane, the pure and the defiled, and so on.

Such a universal One Mind is rather puzzling within the Buddhist context, and it is not immediately clear where such a concept could have come from. The apparent Indic term for One Mind is *ekacitta*. However, within the Indian Buddhist context, *ekacitta* refers to a mental state known as the one-pointed mind, when the mind is absorbed in a single thought or fixated on a single object, achieved through mental concentration prescribed in Buddhism.[15] Hence *ekacitta* does not at all refer to the kind of universal mind that serves as the ground of reality in the *AFM*. Here we see another case of terminological disconnect between Chinese and Indian Buddhist concepts, not unlike the case with Buddha Nature as mentioned previously. Therefore, if One Mind is indeed a Chinese misreading of *ekacitta*, the obvious question is: how did such a misreading take place, *in that particular fashion*? We will take a closer look later in the chapter.

Another possibility for the source of One Mind is Bodhiruci's translation of *citta-mātra* as *yīxīn* 一心, which is translated by most others as mind-only (*wéixīn* 唯心) or consciousness-only (*wéishí* 唯識). Liebenthal cites the translation of *citta-mātra* as one universal mind in the Chinese version of *Daśabhūmika* and *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Liebenthal 1958: 165n2). Clearly One Mind and
p. 329 mind-only have very different meanings since mind-only says nothing about the number of minds. For some reason the *AFM* ↳ fully embraces One Mind whereas mind-only only makes scattered appearances in the text.

It is interesting to note that the *AFM* has been traditionally regarded as a Yogācāra Buddhist text. In this connection, *Daśabhūmika* and *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, where One Mind (as the translation of *citta-mātra*) appears, are also important Yogācāra texts. Incidentally, the alleged translator of the *AFM* into Chinese, Paramārtha, was a famous Yogācāra teacher responsible for the early transmission of Yogācāra in China. Because of its apparent conceptual affinity with Yogācāra, many scholars have assumed that the Mind in the *AFM* is similar to the mind in the Yogācāra School, but mind (*citta*) within the corpus of recognized Yogācāra scriptures does not refer to a universal mind.[16] Hence we are still in the dark as to where the idea of One Mind came from.

If the *AFM* was a Chinese production, a better understanding of the conceptual apparatus and terminological repertoire available to the author(s) of *AFM* in China toward the end of the early medieval period will provide useful clues to the origination of One Mind. For our purpose here, the link between XIAO Yan and Paramārtha is intriguing with respect to the production of the *AFM*. If Paramārtha was unlikely to have been the translator of the *AFM*, which, by contemporary scholarly consensus, was a Chinese text to begin with, and the possibility of him being the author of the text (Grosnick 1989) is also considered problematic (Sharf 2002: 311n85), we are left with few options.[17] As there is no scholarly consensus on the authorship of the *AFM* to work with, its association with Paramārtha is worth exploring, as it might hold the key to our understanding of certain critical components of the text, especially the origin of the concept of One Mind. That is, if we do not take the traditional claim that Paramārtha was the translator of the text as a historical fact[18] but, rather, treat it as a historical clue, the mere fact that he was credited as the translator itself might provide useful hints regarding at least some possible sources of the *AFM*.[19]

According to the forged preface to the T.1666 version of the text,[20] it was Emperor Wu of Liang who dispatched an envoy to the kingdom of Magadha[21] to acquire Buddhist scriptures and recruit Buddhist teachers. Paramārtha was persuaded to go to China and had an audience with XIAO Yan to converse about Buddhism. So, what does crediting Paramārtha as the translator of the *AFM* tell us about the text? Clearly the *AFM* contains some Yogācāra elements, in line with Paramārtha's reputation as a Yogācāra master. But his connection with XIAO Yan was also an important factor, so much so that it is entirely conceivable that a preface was forged to highlight this connection. This means that the encounter between Paramārtha and XIAO Yan (as well as the Southern Chinese Buddhist discourse that bore signs of his influence) needs to be taken more seriously in terms of its relevance to the production of the *AFM*.[22]

Paramārtha stayed in Southern China the entire time, from 546 CE till his death in 569 CE. The fact that Paramārtha stayed in Southern China, which was ruled by XIAO Yan for almost 50 years (502–549 CE), is significant. Due to Emperor Wu's fervent institutional patronage of Buddhism and active intellectual engagement with contemporary Buddhist discourse, the long shadow he
p. 330 cast on the Buddhist landscape in Southern ↳ China should not be overlooked. Therefore, it is conceivable that someone living in XIAO Yan's Southern China—someone like Paramārtha but not necessarily the historical Paramārtha—who was knowledgeable about Yogācāra philosophy as well as the discourse on Buddha Nature authored the *AFM* to synthesize two, under the influence of XIAO Yan and his Southern Chinese Buddhism.[23]

The notion of One Mind in the *AFM* shows an uncanny resonance with XIAO Yan's synthesis of *shen*, Buddha Nature, and the mind. The One Mind in the *AFM* bears the marks of the indestructibility and enlightenability of *shen*, and the universal and absolute characteristics of Buddha Nature, as well as being the substratum of both ignorance and enlightenment, both purity and defilement, and so on. As the result of this grand synthesis in the hands of XIAO Yan as well as those who followed his lead, the mind that emerges is one that is singular, divine, universal, and absolute. This is precisely the idea of the One Mind in the *AFM*, signaling a brand-new conception of mind in Chinese intellectual history, whose importance in the subsequent Chinese intellectual projects cannot be overestimated. Clearly, a more detailed examination of this hypothesis is needed in order to demonstrate the specifics of the terminological and conceptual resonance between the One Mind in the *AFM* and XIAO Yan's Southern Buddhism, but that would have to be left for another occasion.

VI. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have discussed the ways the Chinese intellectual elite appropriated the idea of Buddha Nature in their ongoing debate on *shen* during the early medieval period. The Buddhists came to advocate the indestructibility of *shen* whereas the Confucians insisted on its bodily dependency. The involvement of Buddha Nature in the debate on *shen* elevated the status of *shen*, making it the spiritual entity that would eventually achieve enlightenment by realizing its original purity. Furthermore, this intellectual move from the indestructibility of *shen* to its spiritual awakening as well as the shift toward the mind would herald a singular mind that is the absolute, spiritual, and universal foundation of the world, in its all-encompassing capacity, from the worldly to the transcendent, from *saṃsāra* to *nirvāṇa*, evidenced in the celebrated idea of the One Mind in the *AFM*.

The early medieval Chinese debate on *shen* and Buddha Nature was critical in the birth of a new model of mind that would be shared by the Chinese Buddhists and eventually some neo-Confucians. Such a mind is luminous, originally pure, metaphysical, universal, spiritual, absolute, and indestructible. This grand conception of mind is radically different from a much more modest classical notion of heart-mind (*xin* 心). A good deal of details about this mind still needed to be worked out in the subsequent Chinese intellectual deliberations, but much of the groundwork was laid in the early medieval period. Once such a mind came to the fore, it gradually
p. 331 occupied the center of the intellectual universe in subsequent Chinese history, with some Buddhists declaring ↳ that the mind is the Buddha,[24] and some neo-Confucians asserting that the mind is the cosmic principle or coherence (*lǐ* 理).[25]

Notes

1. **Critical Buddhism (*hihan bukkyō* 批判仏教) in Japan is the most famous manifestation of this tendency in recent scholarship. See Hubbard & Swanson (1997).**
2. **For one of the latest studies of such rivalry, see Campany (2009, 2012).**
3. **A complete translation of the treatise can be found in Balazs (1964: 266–76).**
4. **In XIAO Yan's citation, this reference is attributed to the Liyun (禮運) chapter, but it is actually from the Jiyi chapter of the extant *Book of Rites*. Apparently, this is a favorite citation from the *Book of Rites* for those who used ancestral worship to justify the belief in the indestructible *shen*. For example, ZONG Bing 宗炳 (375–443 CE), an earlier Buddhist sympathizer during the Eastern Jing and Liu Song Dynasties, also used this quotation from the *Liji* to defend the indestructibility of *shen* in his famous treatise *Ming fo lun* 明佛論, T52n2102. Citations and reference for *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* are based on the corpus of the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA 中華電子佛典協會). T is the abbreviation for *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (大正新修大藏經).**
5. **Whalen Lai has a complete translation of XIAO Yan's piece, together with SHEN Ji's commentary, in his "Emperor Wu of Liang on the Immortal Soul, *Shen Pu Mieh*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1981a: 167–75).**
6. **Whalen Lai, in his translator's note, regards this as XIAO Yan's double *entendré*: "*wu-ming shen-ming* can be 'ignorant spirit' or 'precognitive wisdom'" (1981: 172).**

7. Lo (1991, pp. 224–44).

8. Walter Liebenthal, in his famous 1958 article, "New Light on the Mahāyāna-śraddhotpāda śāstra," credits P. Demiéville for the contemporary scholarly consensus that rejects the traditional account. For a more recent introduction to the text, its early commentators, and various modern discussions of controversial issues about its provenance, see Jorgensen et al. (2019: 1–55).

9. The most comprehensive discussion of this issue in English can be found in Liebenthal (1958). I disagree with his locating the production of the text in Northern China as we will see in the following.

10. T32n1666_p0575c21-22.

11. T32n1666_p0575c23-25.

12. T32n1666_p0575c26.

13. T32n1666_p0575c27.

14. T32n1666_p0575c28.

15. Dan Lusthaus (1998), in a brief note discussing sinicizing Buddhist concepts, observes, "The Sanskrit term *ekacitta*, a mind with singular focus (but literally meaning 'one mind') becomes the metaphysical one mind of the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna.*" He does not explain how this happened.

16. In his translator's note, Hakeda advises against trying to match the *AFM* with Yogācāra on their conceptions of the mind (1967: 47).

17. Liebenthal (1958) posits a hypothesis that Dao Chong 道寵 was the author.

18. For a detailed study of the divergent accounts of Paramārtha's translation of *AFM*, see Tao 2013: 126–50.

p. 332 19. Similarly, the reason why Aśvaghoṣa was credited as the author of the *AFM* has more to do with how he was perceived in China, rather than what he was historically. For a recent study, see Young (2015: 130–34).

20. The *Taishō* contains two versions of the *AFM*, T.1666 and T.1667. T.1666 is by far the more popular and influential version, judging by the commentaries that have survived.

21. According to an earlier source, Paramārtha was actually in Funan (present-day Cambodia) where XIAO Yan's envoy met him (Paul 1984: 24).

22. Liebenthal mentions HAYASHI Kemmyō, who traced materials in the *AFM* to Emperor Wu's writings and *Baozang Lun* 寶藏論, but Liebenthal rejects placing the author of the *AFM* in the South since he believes that the *AFM* does not have the notion of an immortal soul embraced by Emperor Wu (Liebenthal 1958: 157–58). But as I will try to show in the following, the One Mind in the *AFM* is an important connection to the immortal soul/spirit. Hence, the connection between Emperor Wu of Liang and the origination of the *AFM* should not be dismissed out of hand.

23. GONG Jun summarizes three theories about the composition of the *AFM*: the famous Korean monk Wonhyo (元曉 617–686 CE) thinks it is the synthesis of a wide varieties of sources; Huiyuan (慧遠 or 淨影寺慧遠 523–592 CE, different from Huiyuan of Mt. Lu 廬山慧遠 334–416 CE) takes *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* as the primary source of the *AFM*; and Japanese scholar YUSUGI Ryōei 湯次了榮 tries to seek a middle ground between these two positions (Gong 1995: 7–8).

24. This is a saying by the famous Chan patriarch Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788 CE).

25. This is the position the famous neo-Confucian WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529 CE) would come to embrace.

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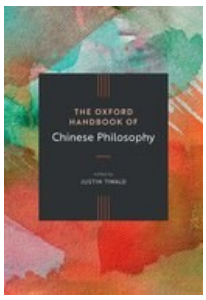

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CHAPTER

17 How It All Depends: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Huayan Buddhism

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Abstract

Few would deny that something ontologically depends on something else. Given that something depends on something, what depends on what? Huayan Buddhism (*Huayan zong* 華嚴宗), a prominent Chinese Buddhist school, is known for its extensive thesis of interdependence, according to which everything depends on everything else. This intriguing thesis is entangled with seemingly paradoxical claims that everything is not only identified with everything else but also contained within it. Moreover, the radical thesis of interdependence entails that dependence is pervasive and symmetric. This chapter first develops a contemporary interpretation of Huayan interdependence by employing the definitional account of essence and the essence-based account of dependence. Through these contemporary resources, it elucidates and unifies the theses of interdependence, mutual identity, and mutual containment within Huayan Buddhism. The chapter then proposes a unique framework of ontological dependence that suggests varying degrees of ontological dependence, aimed at accommodating and explaining away intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence. By contemporizing Huayan Buddhism, it explores its potential and facilitates engagement between contemporary metaphysics and Huayan Buddhism.

Keywords: : Huayan Buddhism, ontological dependence, identity, essence, interdependence, degrees of dependence

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I. Introduction

Few would deny that something ontologically depends on something else. Smiles depend on faces. Bagel holes depend on their host bagels. Sets depend on their members. Numbers depend on each other. Either composite objects depend on their parts, or vice versa. Given that something depends on something, what depends on what?

An extensive thesis of interdependence, according to which everything depends on everything else, is developed in Huayan Buddhism (*Huayan zong* 華嚴宗). This prominent Chinese Buddhist school is named after its chief scripture, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

(*Huayan Jing* 華嚴經).[1] Although later Huayan Buddhists retrospectively trace their lineage through the five patriarchs—Dushun 杜順 (557–640 CE), Zhiyan 智儼 (602–668 CE), Fazang 法藏 (643–712 CE), Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839 CE), and Zongmi 宗密 (780–841 CE)[2]—Fazang is the real founder of Huayan Buddhism. He played a pivotal role in systematizing and disseminating Huayan thoughts, thereby earning him the status of the most significant Huayan figure.[3]

The Huayan thesis of interdependence is inspired and illustrated by the majestic metaphor of Indra's net, which is mentioned a number of times in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.[4] Cook (1977: 2) provides a vivid description of Indra's net:

> Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out indefinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of the jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will
> p. 336 discover ↳ that in its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.

Just as all the glittering jewels in Indra's net reflect one another, all things are interconnected and mutually dependent.

The Huayan thesis of interdependence is philosophically fascinating. Within Huayan Buddhism, one central inquiry revolves around the question of how everything depends on everything else. In Fazang's *Essay on the Golden Lion* 金獅子章 and *Treatise of the Five Teachings* 華嚴五教章,[5] the Huayan thesis of interdependence is anchored in two seemingly paradoxical relationships between all things: mutual identity (*xiāng jí* 相即) and mutual containment (*xiāng rù* 相入). According to Fazang, everything is not only identified with everything else but also contained within it. This, however, raises three questions: How can things with distinct numerical identities, for example, a lion statue and a building, be considered identical? How can a thing, such as a building, be contained within one of its proper parts, such as its rafter? How is the thesis of interdependence explained by the mutual identity and mutual containment of all things in Huayan Buddhism? To answer these questions, I integrate historical Huayan texts with Kit Fine's definitional account of essence and essence-based account of dependence. I show how these contemporary resources can elucidate and unify the theses of interdependence, mutual identity, and mutual containment within Huayan Buddhism.

Moreover, the radical thesis of interdependence entails pervasive and symmetric dependence. If everything depends on everything else, then the rafter of a building and a decorative tile depend on each other. However, at first glance, the rafter and the tile can exist without the other. Moreover, if the thesis of interdependence is true, then the building depends on its parts, and vice versa. This thesis appears to clash with the common belief that dependence is asymmetric. How can the building depend on its parts while the parts also depend on the building? To make sense of pervasive and symmetric dependence, I draw analogies between dependence and gravitation. While our intuition might lead us to believe that the rafter has no influence on a decorative tile or the Earth, gravitation is universal. In fact, the rafter does exert some minute gravitational force on the tile and the Earth. Similarly, Huayan Buddhists can say that the rafter and the tile depend on each other to some small degree, even if it is not overtly apparent. Moreover, the building and its parts may depend on each other to varying degrees, offering a nuanced framework of ontological dependence.

While this chapter contains a historical element, its primary focus centers on exploring the potential of Huayan Buddhism and fostering a more inclusive and diverse philosophical landscape. Through the development of the Huayan thesis of interdependence, I illustrate how Huayan Buddhism and contemporary metaphysics enrich each other. On the one hand, contemporary resources such as the definitional account of essence and the essence-based account of dependence enhance the Huayan thesis of interdependence by developing the thesis in a clear and coherent way. On the other hand, both the account of degrees of ontological dependence and the
p. 337 thesis of ↳ interdependence provide distinctive alternatives for understanding ontological dependence and the intricate interrelationship between all things. Firstly, while we tend to treat ontological dependence like a binary switch—a thing either depends on another or not—the account of degrees of dependence treats ontological dependence like a volume knob, acknowledging varying degrees of dependence. Consequently, it is not sufficient to merely establish what depends on what; we also need to investigate the extent to which one thing depends on another. Secondly, the thesis of interdependence envisions reality as a reciprocal frame structure, where interconnected rods mutually support each other. In contrast, metaphysical foundationalism, a

mainstream view, portrays reality akin to a multilevel building: higher-level things depend on lower-level things, but not vice versa; at the bottom level, there are independent things that serve as foundations for all other things. In short, Huayan Buddhism can introduce fresh perspectives into contemporary metaphysical debates.

Roadmap: Section II introduces the Buddhist notions of dependent origination and raises the question of what depends on what within the context of Huayan Buddhism. Section III examines the relevant historical texts and argues that the Huayan thesis of interdependence is best understood in terms of identity dependence. That is, everything depends on everything else for being the very thing. Section IV enhances the Huayan thesis of interdependence by incorporating insights from contemporary resources, such as Kit Fine's definitional account of essence and essence-based account of dependence. Section V further develops the Huayan thesis of interdependence by proposing varying degrees of ontological dependence, which accommodate and explain away our intuitions against the interdependence of all things. Section VI concludes the chapter by exploring how my development of Huayan Buddhism contributes to ongoing contemporary metaphysical debates.

II. Dependent Origination

The Huayan thesis of interdependence is Huayan Buddhists' take on dependent origination (Sanskrit: *Pratītyasamutpāda*), which is one of defining characteristics of Buddhism. In early Buddhist texts, for example, the *Majjhima Nikāya* and the *Saṃyukta Nikāya*, dependent origination is expressed as "this existing, that exists; this arising, that arises; this not existing, that does not exist; this ceasing, that ceases."[6] This early formulation of dependent origination is open to multiple interpretations and has been further elaborated and developed in various ways. As a result, theses of dependent origination may address the following questions differently:

- Which things are (and are not) subject to dependent origination?
- Given that there are dependent things, where do they dependently originate from?
- Given that something is dependently originated from something, in what sense does the former depend upon the latter?

p. 338 Although the early formulation of dependent origination concerns the existence of things, the existence of a thing can be dependent in several ways. For example, the existence of a loaf of bread is causally, ontologically, and teleologically dependent.

- Causal dependence: The bread causally depends for its existence on its ingredients—such as water, flour, yeast, and salt—and the baking process.
- Ontological dependence: The bread ontologically depends for its existence on its parts, such as its chemical elements, being arranged in a certain way.
- Teleological dependence: The bread teleologically depends for its existence on its purpose, for example, satisfying someone's appetite.

The contemporary notion of causation captures the changes in the natural world and is closely connected to the laws that govern the physical realm. In the case of a loaf of bread, certain laws of nature ensure that the combination of its ingredients and the baking process result in the creation of the bread, making the bread's existence causally dependent on these factors.

Moreover, causal dependence can be distinguished from ontological dependence,[7] as they concern the existence and nature of things in distinct ways. For example, the same loaf of bread exists because its chemical elements are arranged in a specific manner. If different chemical elements were present, the outcome might be a piece of metal instead of bread. While the laws of nature can explain why and how water, flour, yeast, and salt give rise to the bread over time, they do not address why and how the bread's existence depends on its parts at a given moment. The latter aspect can be understood through ontological dependence, which establishes a connection between a thing's existence and its nature in relation to other things. Given that the bread simply would not be categorized as bread if it were composed of the chemical elements of a piece of metal, the bread ontologically depends on its parts for being what it is.

Additionally, apart from causal and ontological dependence, the existence of the bread is teleologically dependent on its purpose. The bread is brought into existence with the purpose of satisfying someone's appetite or serving a specific function. Because the bread would not be made without such a purpose, the bread teleologically depends on its purpose.

It is worth mentioning that the Buddhist notion of causation is more coarse-grained than the contemporary notion that captures the natural world's diachronic changes. Buddhists understand the cause of a thing as what gives rise to the thing, making the Buddhist notion of causation as coarse-grained as the idea of dependent origination itself. Although dependent origination was initially associated with the causally dependent 12 links (Sanskrit: *Nidānas*) of a person's past, present, and future lives, it is subsequently developed to include the ontological dependence of conventional constructs upon primary dharmas in Abhidharma Buddhism. Abhidharma Buddhists develop a two-tier ontology:

> Primary existents (Sanskrit: *dravyasat*) have intrinsic nature (Sanskrit: *svabhāva*)[8] in the sense that they are irreducible and mind independent. ↳
>
> Conventional existents (Sanskrit: *prajñaptisat*) arise from our conceptual and linguistic activities; they are constructed and accepted by us based on their practical uses.

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Abhidharma Buddhists identify primary existents as *dharma*s, which are particular occurrences of properties such as shape, color, heat, and solidity. These dharmas, being indivisible and momentary simples, serve as the foundational elements of everything else in the world.[9] In contrast, conventional existents such as persons, chariots, trees, and stars are considered as constructions we assemble from aggregates of primary dharmas to suit our practical needs. In Abhidharma Buddhism, the ontological dependence of conventional existents upon primary dharmas is both mereological and conceptual. It is mereological in the sense that conventional existents depend on their parts; it is conceptual in the sense that conventional existents depend on our conceptual and linguistic activities. Moreover, the ontological dependence and teleological dependence of conventional existents coincide with each other, provided that conventional existents are constructed and accepted by us for their specific practical uses.

The two-tier Abhidharma ontology was revolutionized by Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250 CE), who is recognized as the most significant Buddhist philosopher after the historical Buddha. Nāgārjuna developed the thesis of emptiness (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*), according to which all things are empty of intrinsic nature. Consequently, there are no primary existents that are irreducible and mind independent, and even Abhidharma Buddhists' dharmas are our conventional constructs. Since its inception, Nāgārjuna's thesis of emptiness has been open to many interpretations.[10] Following Westerhoff's (2009, 2022) interpretation, the thesis of emptiness does not mean that things do not exist, nor does it mean that things lack essence if the essence of a thing is what the thing cannot lose without ceasing to be the very thing. Instead, the thesis of emptiness entails that all things lack independent existence in a particular manner: they are not free from our conceptual and linguistic activities and therefore are not objectively real.

Nāgārjuna's thesis of emptiness has a dominant influence on Chinese Buddhism, including Huayan Buddhism, and is often viewed as a starting point for Chinese Buddhist theoretical development. Like Nāgārjuna, Huayan Buddhists offer a radical answer to the question of what is dependently originated—everything is. But Huayan Buddhists provide their own answer to the question of what a thing depends on for its existence. While the thesis of emptiness only entails that everything depends on *something else*, Huayan Buddhists go further by advocating a thesis of universal dependence, asserting that everything depends on *everything else*.

In what sense does everything depend on everything else? The Huayan thesis of interdependence revolves around two seemingly paradoxical relationships between all things: mutual identity and mutual containment. In his overview of Huayan doctrines, the *Essay on the Golden Lion*, Fazang utilizes a golden lion as a metaphor to illustrate key Huayan doctrines. The gold represents the ultimate principle behind all things (*lǐ* 理), while the golden lion represents the totality of all things in the world (*shì* 事). According to Fazang, the golden lion and all its parts are not only identified with but also contained by each other:

p. 340 ↳

(a) Each organ and hair-tip of the lion completely encompasses the lion through the gold. Each thoroughly pervades the lion's eye. The eye of the lion is its ear, its ear is its nose, its nose is its tongue, and its tongue is its body.[11] (T.45.1880.665b19–22)[12]

(b) In each of the lion's eyes, ears, limbs, joints, and in each hair, there is the golden lion. All the lions contained with in each

single hair simultaneously and instantaneously enter into a single hair. In each hair, there are infinitely many lions, and in addition, all the single hairs, together with their infinitely many lions, in turn, enter into a single hair. It is repeated infinitely in this way, like the jewels of Celestial Lord Indra's net.[13] (T.45.1880.665c19–27)

These texts raise three intriguing questions:

- In what sense are any two things, such as a golden lion and its nose, considered identical?
- In what sense do all things contain each other? This is particularly puzzling when a thing, such as the golden lion, is contained within one of its proper parts, such as its nose.
- How is the thesis of interdependence explained by the mutual identity and mutual containment of all things in Huayan Buddhism?

Section III answers the first question by showing that the Huayan thesis of mutual identity is best understood in terms of the definitional notion of identity. Section IV answers the second and third questions. Kit Fine's (1994a) definitional account of essence and (1994b) notion of constitutive essence can explain in what sense everything contains everything else. Moreover, Fine's (1995) essence-based account of ontological dependence can bridge the thesis of interdependence with the mutual identity and mutual containment of all things.

III. Mutual Identity

Although the most straightforward way of understanding identity is to take it as the numerical identity relation that a thing has to itself, the Huayan thesis of mutual identity does not entail that all things are numerically identical with each other.[14] In the following paragraph in the *Essay on the Golden Lion*, Fazang refers to the lion (including its parts) as many and thereby recognizes the numerical distinctness between things:

(c) The gold and the lion established each other compatibly. One and many do not obstruct each other. In this, the principle (*lǐ* 理) and things (*shì* 事) are each different. Either one or many. Each remains in its position.[15] (T.45.1880.665b10–14)

Moreover, the mutual identity of all things is not the thesis that all things share one and the same principle.[16] Although Fazang refers to *lǐ* as one in the above paragraph and holds that all things share the same principle, his thesis of mutual identity captures a more intricate relationship between things.

In the more detailed *Treatise of the Five Teachings*, Fazang uses a building (including its parts) as a metaphor to elucidate the relationships between all things, including their mutual identity. The building, like the golden lion, represents the totality of all things, while a part of the building, for example, its rafter, represents a thing in the world. According to Fazang, one part of the building, its rafter, is identified with the building as well as other parts of the building. And the reason why the rafter is the building is that the existence of the rafter is necessary and sufficient for the building:

(d) The rafter is the building. Why? Because the rafter by itself establishes the building. Without the rafter, the building is not established. When there is the rafter, there is the building.[17] (T.45.1866.507c21–24)

Although Fazang's notion of identity ties to modality, it is richer than modal notions such as necessary and sufficient.[18] The rafter is the building because, without the rafter, the building is spoiled:

(e) Question: Why would there be no building if a single rafter is absent? Answer: That would be a spoiled building, not a perfect building. Therefore, you should know that the perfect building is inherent in the one rafter. Since it is inherent in this one rafter, you should know that the rafter is the building.[19] (T.45.1866.508a12–14)

Similarly, the rafter is the parts of the building because, without the rafter, the parts are spoiled:

(f) Question: Since the building is the rafter, then the planks, roof tiles, etc. should also be the rafter? Answer: They all are the

rafter. Why? Without the rafter, there would be no building. If there is no rafter, the building is spoiled. If the building is spoiled, then you cannot speak of the planks, roof tiles, etc. Hence, the planks, roof tiles, etc. are the rafter. If they were not the rafter, the building could not be established. The rafter, tiles, etc. could not be established. Now they are all established, we know they are identical with each other.[20] (T.45.1866.508a14–20)

In what sense does the absence of a thing, for example, the rafter, spoil another thing, for example, the building? Priest's (2018) interpretation of Huayan Buddhism involves the definitional notion of identity, which captures what it is for a thing to be the very thing. If the rafter defines what the building is, then without the rafter, the building would no longer be the very building. Generally, one way for a thing to go out of existence is for it to lose the conditions for being the very thing. Hence, when some condition for
p. 342 being ↳ the very building, for example, the rafter, is not present, the building does not exist. This is how the building is spoiled by the absence of the rafter.

By claiming that the rafter is the building as well as its parts, Fazang does not mean the rafter is ontologically prior to the building and other parts of the building:

(g) Question: If the rafter all by itself totally establishes the building, then if there are still no roof tiles and other things, how can it establish the building? Answer: When there are no tiles and such things, the rafter is not a rafter, so it does not establish the building.[21]

The rafter would only be the very rafter when it is in the building and relates to the planks, roof tiles, and so on, in a certain way. The building would only be the very building when all its parts, including the rafter, are arranged in a certain way. And other parts of the building, for example, planks and tiles, are themselves when they are in the building and relate to the rest of the building in a certain way. In short, the building and its parts define what each other is; consequently, they ontologically depend on each other for being what they are.

IV. Essence and Dependence

As shown in Section III, the Huayan thesis of mutual identity is best understood in terms of the definitional notion of identity. In contemporary philosophy, Kit Fine (1994a) explains the definitional notion of identity in terms of essence; Fine (1994b) develops different senses of essence; Fine (1995) explores the relationship between essence and ontological dependence. In this section, I show how Fine's views of essence and dependence can help elucidate and unify the puzzling Huayan theses of interdependence, mutual identity, and mutual containment.

Fine (1994a) constructs a definitional account of essence, where the essence of a thing characterizes what the thing is (i.e., the identity of that thing). For example, the essence of the singleton set {Socrates}—containing Socrates as its sole member—characterizes what {Socrates} is. In Fine's view, this notion of identity is stronger than pure modal notions such as necessity and sufficiency. Although the presence of {Socrates} is modally necessary and sufficient for the presence of Socrates, the presence of {Socrates} has nothing to do with what Socrates is. Fine's definitional account of essence aligns well with Fazang's explanation of mutual identity. According to Fazang, the rafter defines what the building is; without the rafter, the building would not be the very building.

Fine (1994b: 57) thinks that essences have constituents. For example, {Socrates}'s essence, containing Socrates as its sole member, has Socrates as a constituent. This can make sense of the puzzling thesis of mutual containment in Huayan Buddhism. Recall the golden lion metaphor. In paragraph (b), Fazang claims that the golden lion and all its parts contain each other. With Fine's help, we
p. 343 can say that *x* contains *y* in the ↳ sense that *y* is a constituent of *x*'s essence. Even though the lion contains the lion nose as its mereological part, the essence of the lion nose can still have the whole lion as a constituent.

Moreover, Fine (1995: 275–276) endorses the essence-based account of ontological dependence, according to which *x* ontologically depends on *y* just in case *y* is a constituent of *x*'s essence. For example, {Socrates} ontologically depends on Socrates because Socrates is a constituent of {Socrates}'s essence. Huayan Buddhists can use this account to unify the mutual identity, mutual

containment, and interdependence of all things. Given that everything's essence has all things else as its constituents, everything ontologically depends on everything else.

In conclusion, Fine's work on essence and dependence facilitates a way to clarify and enrich the historical Huayan view. Nonetheless, while some of Fine's ideas improve Huayan Buddhism, others are irrelevant or even unfriendly. Notably, Fine's (1995: 283) restriction on two things constituting each other's essences does not align with the Huayan thesis of mutual identity. Hence, Huayan Buddhists should not accept every aspect of Fine's view without scrutiny. Moreover, by integrating Huayan Buddhism with Fine's work, I do not mean to suggest that Fazang, who lived many centuries ago, had the contemporary ideas of essence and dependence, as that would be anachronistic. Rather, my goal is to explore how certain contemporary resources can realize the potential of Huayan Buddhism.

V. Degrees of Ontological Dependence

The Huayan thesis of interdependence entails that ontological dependence is pervasive. Even if two things appear to be separable, they depend on each other. The Huayan thesis of interdependence also entails that ontological dependence is symmetric. Any pair of things depend on each other. Recall the building metaphor in Fazang's *Treatise of the Five Teachings*. Although the rafter is seemingly separable from a decorative tile, Fazang insists on asserting that the rafter depends on the tile for being the very rafter. In general, the building and all its parts depend on each other, as the building and its parts define what each other is. The Huayan thesis of interdependence is thereby in tension with our intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence. We tend to believe that the rafter and a decorative tile can exist without each other. We also tend to believe that dependence is asymmetric. How can the building depend on its parts while the parts also depend on the building?

In the Huayan view, our intuitions are erroneous. But this does not mean Huayan Buddhists cannot accommodate our intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence. To see this, let us first consider what ancient people tend to believe about our physical world. It seems that the rafter and a decorative tile do not attract each other. It also seems that the Earth attracts the building, but not vice versa. As a result, it is tempting to believe physical foundationalism, according to which:

(1) Our physical world has different levels, including a foundational level.

(2) Lower-level things attract higher-level things, but not vice versa.

(3) Physical foundations are not attracted by anything.

In fact, in ancient Hindu mythology, our Earth is described as resting on four elephants, which in turn rest on a giant tortoise.

But now we know that the Earth does not rest on anything. It orbits around the sun, which in turn orbits around the center of our galaxy. According to Newton's universal gravitation, a universal force is behind various physical phenomena. Even though the rafter does not seem to attract a decorative tile, gravitation is pervasive. The rafter and the tile gravitate toward each other. The force is hard to notice because of the distance between them and the small amounts of mass they have. Similarly, even though the building does not seem to attract the Earth while the Earth attracts the building, gravitation is symmetric. The Earth and the building gravitate toward each other. The force is hard to notice for the Earth because the Earth is much more massive than the building. In general, different physical phenomena are due to different masses of physical bodies and distances between them. They are not due to having or lacking gravitation. Any two material bodies gravitate toward each other.

Huayan Buddhists can develop a thesis of interdependence that resembles Newton's universal gravitation. Ontological dependence is pervasive, even though the rafter does not seem to depend on a decorative tile. The rafter and the tile depend on each other to a small degree. This explains why we tend to overlook the mutual dependence between the two. Similarly, ontological dependence is symmetric, even though the building and its parts do not seem to depend on each other simultaneously. Perhaps, their mutual dependence is hard to notice because the building depends more on its parts than the other way around. In general, our intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence are not due to having or lacking ontological dependence. Everything ontologically

depends on everything else, but some things are more dependent than others. By appealing to different degrees of ontological dependence, Huayan Buddhists can reinterpret our intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence.

It is worth clarifying that by constructing a thesis of interdependence that resembles universal gravitation, Huayan Buddhists are not committed to the truth of universal gravitation because the two theses have different subject matter. Even if it is false, universal gravitation is still able to reinterpret our native observations about the physical world. This is how universal gravitation can help Huayan Buddhists—or any proponent of the thesis of interdependence—explain away our intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence.

It is also worth clarifying that varying degrees of ontological dependence are orthogonal to the thesis of interdependence. On the one hand, the thesis of interdependence does not entail that ontological dependence comes in degrees. A proponent of the thesis of interdependence is free to treat ontological dependence as a binary switch or a volume knob. On the other hand, acknowledging varying degrees of ontological dependence does not imply the interdependence of all things. Even if ontological dependence is more
p. 345 like a volume knob than a binary switch, the degree of dependence ↳ between two objects can be zero. Moreover, varying degrees of ontological dependence are not an *ad hoc* defense for the thesis of interdependence but can be independently motivated. It looks like, for example, Harry Potter ontologically depends more on his creator, J. K. Rowling, than his archenemy, Lord Voldemort, and he depends more on Lord Voldemort than his mentor, Professor Dumbledore, for being who he is. It also looks like a bagel hole depends more on the inner side of its host bagel that outskirts the hole's boundary than the outer side of its bagel.

Given that varying degrees of ontological dependence are orthogonal to the thesis of interdependence, should Huayan Buddhists acknowledge that ontological dependence comes in degrees? In addition to accommodating the intuitions against pervasive and symmetric dependence, the view aligns harmoniously with the renowned Huayan metaphor, Indra's net. To illustrate, consider a jewel within Indra's net, labeled as J_1. While J_1 reflects all other jewels in the net, these jewel images exhibit a diversity of sizes within J_1. The size of a jewel's image in J_1 is contingent upon both the size of the jewel and its distance from J_1. Suppose the image of a jewel, J_2, is larger than the image of another jewel, J_3. This discrepancy could arise due to J_2 being larger than J_3, J_2 being closer to J_1, or a combination of both factors.

How jewel images vary their sizes in Indra's net inspires a way to develop the idea that ontological dependence comes in degrees. Huayan Buddhists can take the entire reflected image in J_1 to represent the essence of J_1, and they can take the size of a particular jewel image in J_1 to indicate the degree of J_1's ontological dependence upon the jewel. Then they can develop the idea that how much J_1 depends on a jewel is based on both the "size" of the jewel and its "distance" from J_1. For example, they can understand the "sizes" of things as degrees of being. According to McDaniel (2013), existence comes in degrees, and some things exist more than others. Perhaps Harry Potter ontologically depends more on J. K. Rowling than Lord Voldemort because Rowling exists more than Voldemort. Similarly, Huayan Buddhists can maintain the apparent asymmetry between some mutually dependent things, for example, the building and its parts, by pointing out that one's degree of existence is higher than the other. Moreover, Huayan Buddhists can understand a thing's "distance" from another as how relevant the former is to the identity of the latter. Perhaps Harry Potter ontologically depends more on Voldemort than Dumbledore because Voldemort plays a more significant role in defining who Harry Potter is. Similarly, Huayan Buddhists can say that the rafter depends more on the building than a decorative tile because the building plays a more significant role in shaping the identity of the rafter.[22]

VI. An Alternative to Metaphysical Foundationalism

In sum, my contemporary construct of the Huayan thesis of interdependence includes two developments of the historical thesis.
p. 346 First, it incorporates the definitional account ↳ of essence and the essence-based account of dependence. With the help of these analytic resources, we see how the Huayan thesis of interdependence is clarified and unified with the mutual identity and mutual containment of all things. Second, to make sense of pervasive and symmetric dependence, I propose that ontological dependence comes in degrees. While my contemporary construct realizes the potential of Huayan Buddhism in these two ways, how does it contribute to contemporary metaphysical debates?

The thesis of interdependence pictures reality like a reciprocal frame structure in which rods mutually support each other. It provides a viable alternative to metaphysical foundationalism, which pictures reality like a multilevel building:[23]

(1) Reality is divided into multiple levels, including a foundational level.

(2) Higher-level things depend on lower-level things, but not the other way around.

(3) Things at the foundational level are independent.

Metaphysical foundationalism has a long history. The idea can be traced back to the Greek tradition, and it is dominant in Abhidharma Buddhism. Moreover, the view is often taken as the mainstream in contemporary literature, as shown in Cameron (2008), Schaffer (2010), Bennett (2011, 2017), and Rosen (2010).

Metaphysical foundationalism is often motivated by some version of the regress argument. Roughly, since dependent things cannot come into existence by themselves, their existence requires independent things to serve as their foundations.[24] Nonetheless, as Bliss (2013), Barnes (2018), and Thompson (2016) correctly point out, the regress argument does not favor foundationalism. Even though a single dependent thing cannot come into existence by itself, a group of dependent things may support each other and come into existence together. This is just like in a reciprocal frame structure, even though each sloping rod cannot support itself, the rods support each other and give rise to the frame structure.

Metaphysical foundationalism has been challenged. Bliss (2013) and Priest (2009) argue that there might be infinitely many levels all the way down, while Thompson (2016) argues that there might just be exactly one level. All these challenges that (1) reality is divided into multiple levels, including a foundational level. Moreover, Wilson (2014), Rodriguez-Pereyra (2015), and Barnes (2018) argue that there might be dependent foundational things. If they are right, then it is not the case that (3) things at the foundational level are independent.

My contemporary thesis of Huayan interdependence, especially degrees of ontological dependence, challenges that (2) higher-level things depend on lower-level things, but not the other way around. In my framework, all things depend on each other to varying degrees, and even lower-level things may depend on higher-level things to a small extent. Nonetheless, one might raise an objection to my contemporary Huayan thesis of interdependence by arguing that it is simply a conceptual truth that lower-level things cannot depend on higher-level things. To reply, saying that *x* ontologically depends on *y* is just to say that *x*'s existence and identity rely upon *y*. This does not forbid lower-level entities from depending on higher-level entities. In general, we should be ↳ aware that unorthodox alternatives can sound funny for bad reasons. Consider George Orwell's discussion of Newspeak in his *1984*. "Big Brother is ungood" sounds contradictory in Newspeak because the meaning of "good" ties to the meaning of "Big Brother." Once we separate the meanings of the two words—like what we do in English—we are able to utter a perfectly sensible sentence. It turns out that when we bundle various notions together, we run the risk of creating necessary connections that do not really exist. In light of this reasoning, I suspect that the conceptual link between dependence and levels might be an artifact of our understanding rather than an inherent reason for metaphysical foundationalism.

In addition to offering a viable alternative to metaphysical foundationalism, degrees of ontological dependence can reshape the landscape of first-order metaphysical debates. This is because ontological dependence plays a crucial role in framing such debates as whether wholes depend on their parts, if the mind depends on the body, whether properties depend on their bearers, and if sets depend on their members, among others. Traditionally, ontological dependence has been viewed as a binary switch—either a thing depends on another or not—but the account of degrees of dependence treats it as a scaled spectrum. This nuanced perspective opens up new possibilities for understanding the complexities of ontological relationships between various things by transcending the binary view.

By constructing a contemporary Huayan thesis of interdependence, I demonstrate how contemporary metaphysics and Huayan Buddhism can be mutually beneficial. I do not expect that an analytic metaphysician would fully align with all aspects of Huayan Buddhist perspectives, nor vice versa. However, by integrating resources from these diverse traditions, we can recognize how they complement each other. Together, they can advance metaphysics beyond the limitations of each individual tradition.[25]

Notes

1. In Chinese Buddhism, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is presumed to be the first sermon of the Buddha after he attained enlightenment and is thus believed to provide the most comprehensive and profound Buddhist truth. For more information about the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, including its significance, see Buswell and Lopez (2014: 84) and Cleary (1993).

2. According to Fang (2012: 36), the list of the five patriarchs was created by Zongmi.

3. For more details regarding Fazang's contribution to Huayan Buddhism, see Fang (2012: 22–39).

4. For example, a description of Indra's net appears in Book 25, *Ten Dedications* (Cleary 1993: 683). In Book 33, *Inconceivable Qualities of Buddhas*, Indra's net is used to characterize the interrelationship between all things (Cleary 1993: 925).

5. This treatise is also known as *Paragraphs on the Doctrine of Difference and Identity of the One Vehicle of Huayan* 華嚴一乘教義分齊章.

6. Gethin (1998: 141).

7. But Bennett (2017: Chapter 4) argues that the line between causal and ontological dependence is unclear.

p. 348 8. The Sanskrit word *svabhāva* does not have a perfect English translation. Its prefix *sva* has been translated to self, intrinsic, own, and inherent; and *bhāva* has been translated to being, existence, nature, and essence. The precise meaning of the term *svabhāva* often depends on the philosophical context where the term is used. The notion is complex and often entangled with existence, nature, and essence.

9. Although fundamental dharmas are ontologically independent, they are still causally dependent and hence subject to dependent origination.

10. For overviews of contemporary interpretations, see Siderits (2007: chapter 8) and Westerhoff (2022: section 2).

11. Alternative translations: Chan (1963: 411); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 89).

12. "T." refers to the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, which is a comprehensive collection of east Asian Buddhist scriptures and canonical writings. T.45.1866.507c21–24 is an abbreviation for *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, Volume 45, Text 1866, Page 507, Row c, Line 21–24.

13. Alternative translations: Chan (1963: 412); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 90).

14. But Chang (1971: 136) interprets the Huayan thesis of mutual identity in terms of numerical identity.

15. Alternative translations: Chan (1963: 411); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 89).

16. But Cook (1977, 1979) and Odin (1982) interpret the Huayan thesis of mutual identity in terms of emptiness, a universal principle shared by all things. According to them, two things are identical in the sense that they share the important mark of being empty of intrinsic nature.

17. Alternative translations: Cook (1977: 78); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 82).

18. But Jones (2009: 205) reduces the Huayan notion of identity to modality: "one entity is another entity just if the presence of the one is both necessary and sufficient for the presence of the other."

19. Alternative translations: Cook (1977: 82); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 82).

20. Alternative translations: Cook (1977: 82); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 83).

21. Alternative translations: Cook (1977: 79); Tiwald and Van Norden (2014: 82).

22. Priest (2014) develops a similar interpretation of Huayan Buddhism, proposing that something can be more significant than another in shaping the identity of a particular thing. Suppose that *x* is more significant than *y* in

defining *z*. For Priest, this is due to the fact that the relation between *x* and *z* is more significant than the relation between *y* and *z*. Moreover, Priest (2014: 173) observes the view is analogous to Newtonian theory of gravitation; Priest (2014: 181) observes the view is analogous to Indra's net.

23. But Jones (2018, 2019b, 2022) develops a foundationalist interpretation of Huayan interdependence, according to which each object is aspectually foundational and aspectually dependent.

24. The argument can be traced back to Leibniz (1989: 85). Contemporary proponents of the argument include Cameron (2008), Schaffer (2010), Tahko and Lowe (2020), and Bennett (2011, 2017).

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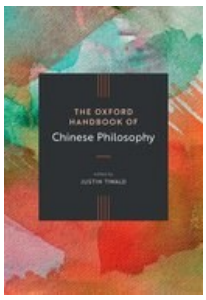

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CHAPTER

18 zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian Metaphysics of Human Nature: Explanatory, Not Foundational

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Abstract

Neo-Confucianism marks a turning point in the development of Confucianism, and one of its significant contributions to the Confucian tradition is its development of a sophisticated metaphysical system. In contemporary philosophy, however, with a naturalistic turn and in a so-called postmetaphysical era, metaphysics has often become a burden rather than an asset. There are, however, two types of metaphysics, foundational and explanatory, and contemporary criticisms of metaphysics are directed to the former and not the latter. Foundational metaphysics starts with the metaphysical as the foundation of everything empirical and practical, while explanatory metaphysics starts with the empirical and practical, with the metaphysical constructed only to explain the empirical and practical. This chapter, with a focus on ZHU Xi, argues that the neo-Confucian metaphysics is explanatory, not foundational.

Keywords: : Zhu Xi, metaphysics, Confucianism, human nature, animal nature
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I. Introduction

ZHŪ Xī 朱熹 (1130–1200) is commonly and justifiably regarded as the greatest synthesizer of the neo-Confucian thinking. One of the things that makes neo-Confucianism new, in comparison with classical Confucianism, is its development of moral metaphysics as an ontotheological articulation of classical Confucian moral values. Of course, classical Confucians do not reject metaphysics. As a matter of fact, almost all the terms and even ideas neo-Confucians use in their project of metaphysical articulation can be found in Confucian classics. It is only that, in classical Confucianism, such terms and ideas either lack a clearly metaphysical significance or, if they do have such significance, do not occupy a central place in their system. The main concern of classical Confucians is how to live a moral life, not to provide a metaphysical articulation of such a moral life.

However, in this so-called antimetaphysical or postmetaphysical age, metaphysics has often become a liability instead of an asset for a philosopher. In his *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, Habermas characterizes such a thinking as respecting "the authority of the empirical sciences" for its being "dispassionate"; in such a thinking "it would be the procedural rationality of the scientific process that would decide whether or not a sentence has a truth-value in the first place" (Habermas 1992: 6). In an interview with a graduate student philosophy journal at Harvard University, Richard Rorty also declares that we are now living in a postmetaphyiscal culture,

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> in which the imperative that is common to religion and metaphysics—to find an ahistorical, transcultural matrix for one's thinking, something into which everything can fit, independent of one's time and place—has dried up and blown away. It would be a culture in which people thought of human beings as creating their own life-world, rather than as being responsible to God or "the nature of reality," which tells them what kind it is. (Rorty 1995: 59)

Partially for this reason, scholars of Confucianism in the Anglo-American tradition tend to shy away from neo-Confucianism, while scholars in China who are not influenced by and familiar with this anti- or postmetaphysical thinking and thus continue to expound the neo-Confucian metaphysics are often caught off guard when challenged by someone trained in the postmetaphysical thinking. In this chapter, however, I shall try to show that there are two types of metaphysics, foundational and explanatory, and contemporary criticisms of metaphysics, when plausible, are largely targeted at the former and not the latter. Then I shall examine ZHU Xi's neo-Confucian metaphysics of human nature, to show that it is explanatory and not foundational and so is immune to the criticism by postmetaphysical thinkers.

II. Two Types of Metaphysics: Foundational and Explanatory

Metaphysics, by its very nature, is supposed to discuss things beyond our sense perception. However, there can be two ways of doing metaphysics. The traditional one in the West is foundational. It attempts to construct a metaphysical (system of) idea(s) independent from our empirical and practical knowledge and then derive from it everything empirical and practical, if needs be. Descartes's philosophy is an example of such a metaphysics par excellence. However, since I am more concerned about moral metaphysics in this chapter, I shall use a contemporary example, the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre.

In his argument against Rawlsian liberals who claim that we have to construct political principles of justice independent of any religious and metaphysical conception of good life on which people don't, cannot, and (in a sense) should not have agreement, Alasdair MacIntyre agrees that "our society is one not of consensus, but of division and conflict," but then he adds, "at least so as the nature of justice is concerned" (MacIntyre 1988: 1–2). In constructing the idea of the right or justice, some "appeal to inalienable human rights, others to some notion of social contract, and others again to a standard of utility" (MacIntyre 1988: 1). Therefore, we are presented with many conflicting and even contradicting principles of justice, libertarian, contractarian, utilitarian, and many others. We may try to determine which one of them is rational or more rational than others, but the difficulty in doing so, MacIntyre
p. 354 argues, is multiplied by the diversity ↳ of views of rationality. For some, to be rational "is to act on the basis of calculations of the costs and benefits to oneself of each possible alternative course of action and its consequences"; to others, it is "to act under those constraints which any rational person, capable of an impartiality which accords no particular privileges to one's own interests, would agree should be imposed"; to still others, it is "to act in such a way as to achieve the ultimate and true good of human beings" (MacIntyre 1988: 2).

To reach the desired consensus on rationality and then on justice, therefore, MacIntyre agrees with liberals that we need "some standard, independent of the desires, preferences, and wills of the contending parties, to which appeal can be made in trying to show why the reasons supporting one point of view are superior to those supporting another" (MacIntyre 1991: 97). Unlike liberals, however, MacIntyre argues that

> a necessary precondition for a political community's possession of adequately determinate shared rationally founded moral rules is the shared possession of a rationally justifiable conception of human good. And … insofar as appeals to moral rules are to play a part in the public life of such a community, respect for and allegiance to that shared conception of the human good will have had to be institutionalized in the life of that community." (MacIntyre 1990: 351)

For justice to be a virtue, just as for courage, generosity, loyalty, benevolence, fraternity, or any other human character to be a virtue, MacIntyre argues, we need "some prior account of certain features of social and moral life in terms of which it has to be defined and explained" (MacIntyre 1984: 186). This prior account, according to MacIntyre, is nothing but the account of the good human life. In this sense, "the concept of the good life for man is prior to the concept of a virtue" (MacIntyre 1984: 184). MacIntyre maintains that

> what justice requires depends therefore upon prior rational agreement as to the nature of justice, and rational enquiry into the nature of justice depends in turn upon prior agreement on the nature of the good, and more fundamentally still upon those background beliefs in terms of which good is defined and understood. (MacIntyre 1991: 100)

In other words, to have a conception of the just or the right, we need a theory of virtue to explain the nature of justice or rightness; to know the nature of a virtue, we need an account of the good; and to know the nature of the good, we need to have a metaphysical or even religious conception of the telos of human life (MacIntyre 1990: 344).

However, there is another way of doing metaphysics, which is explanatory. Explanatory metaphysics starts from our empirical and/or practical knowledge and aims to explain such knowledge: why our empirical world is so and why our practical world should be so. It is true that such a way of doing metaphysics is less conventional in the West, but there is also a good example, particularly relevant to our concern with moral metaphysics here. What I have in mind here is the moral philosopher Charles Taylor.

p. 355 A fellow critic of political liberalism, Taylor does not share MacIntrye's mistrust for contemporary moral values such as autonomy, rights, and individuality. In this respect, he agrees with liberals that they are values that we should cherish. However, he claims that liberals fail to explain why they are values instead of disvalues. To do so successfully, Taylor claims that there is a need for a metaphysical explanation or, using his own words, ontological articulation, of liberal values. Since such an articulation takes for granted ideas to be articulated, Taylor argues that it cannot be foundational, apodictic, or external but has to be practical, ad hominem, and internal. The external approach asks us to start directly from a moral ontology of the constitutive good and then either deduce our moral standards from it or determine whether our existing moral standards fit with this independently constructed moral ontology. In its secular form, it asks us to "first realize that the world is ordered for the good, and then deduce from this fact that you ought to embrace certain moral reactions, internalize certain moral intuitions"; and in its theistic form, it requires us to "first realize that there is a God; he is good, creator, etc.; and *then* you will see that you ought to worship him, obey him, etc." (Taylor 1989: 73).

In contrast, Taylor maintains that the transcendental argument for, the ontological articulation of, or the metaphysical explanation about the constitutive good of a liberal morality, the good that constitutes the liberal morality as good, has to start from our deep and strong moral instincts, such as those related to individuality, autonomy, and human rights, and then argue that, in order for these instincts to be possible, true, and coherent, there must be something that makes them to be so. The basic idea is, Taylor points out, "that our explicit beliefs about our world and ourselves are held against a background of unformulated (and perhaps unformulable) understandings, in relation to which these beliefs make the sense they do" (Taylor 1995a: 29). Thus, if the things reflected in our moral instincts are good, the transcendental argument aims to find the thing that constitutes them, that is, to find their constitutive good. The transcendental argument here "does not offer us a consideration we have to acknowledge quite independently of our ethical intuitions; rather it is an attempt to articulate these intuitions, to make them more perspicuous and palpable" (Taylor 1995b: 138).[1]

It is true that, in their criticisms of metaphysics, postmetaphysical thinkers do not make the distinction between foundational and explanatory metaphysics, but their main problem is indeed with the foundational metaphysics, largely because metaphysics is typically foundational in the Western philosophical tradition. Rorty claims that metaphysics and religion are conversation stoppers, when he quotes Stephen Carter: "One good way to end a conversation … is to tell a group of well-educated professionals that you hold a political position … because it is required by your understanding of God's will" (Rorty 1999: 171). The reason that foundational metaphysics functions as a conversation stopper is thus clear: well-educated people cannot be reasonably expected to agree upon such supposedly independently constructed "foundations," from which everything moral and political is to be derived. In contrast, explanatory metaphysics starts from the moral and political convictions or instincts that both well-educated and common people deeply share, which serve as common grounds for conversations, including conversations regarding their ontological
p. 356 articulations, transcendental ↳ arguments, or metaphysical explanations. As they may not agree upon such articulations of,

arguments for, and explanations about things they share, even after fruitful and mutually enlightening conversations, explanatory metaphysics, unlike the foundational one, is consistent with pluralism.[2]

III. Zhu Xi's Metaphysics of Human Nature (*xìng* 性)

Following the Mencian line of Confucianism, ZHU Xi regards human nature not merely as something that human beings are born with but also as something characteristic of human beings, something that distinguishes human beings from other beings. The question is what distinguishes human beings from other beings. Philosophers in the Western tradition have almost unanimously accepted the view that it is rationality, although they may disagree on precisely what rationality is, as shown by MacIntyre, mentioned earlier. Given this, it may seem surprising that this idea has hardly occurred to Confucian philosophers, including ZHU Xi. For them, it is just a simple truth that what is characteristic of human beings must be their humanness, humaneness, or humanity, which is precisely what *rén* 仁,[3] the most important Confucian virtue, means. So, for ZHU Xi, what distinguishes human beings from beasts is not rationality but the virtue of *ren*, as it is human nature. Although *ren* is only one of the four cardinal Confucian virtues, along with *yì* 義 (rightness), *lǐ* 禮 (propriety), and *zhì* 智 (moral wisdom) (and sometimes a fifth one, *xìn* 信 [trustworthiness] is added), which all belong to human nature, ZHU Xi argues that *ren* in one sense is inclusive. In his essay "On *Ren*," ZHU Xi states that,

> although virtues of the heart-mind are comprehensive and thorough, with nothing lacking, to summarize it in one word, it is *ren*. Let me try to explain it. The heart-mind of heaven and earth has four virtues: originating, penetrating, harvesting, and correcting, and the virtue of originating is all inclusive; the movement of heaven and earth is spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and the life-giving force of spring is all inclusive. Thus the human heart-mind also has four virtues, *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom, and *ren* is all inclusive. (ZHU Xi 1996: 3545)

However, precisely in what sense does the virtue of *ren* lead and even include all other virtues? For ZHU Xi, since *ren* is what makes a human being a human being, it "itself is the substance, while propriety is the action guide in accordance with *ren*, rightness is the judgment [regarding concrete situations] in accordance with *ren*, and wisdom is distinguishing [between right and wrong] in accordance with *ren*" (*Yulei* 6: Zhu 1997: 99). In another place, he makes an analogy: "human nature is general. It is like a human body, where *ren* is the left hand, propriety is the right hand, rightness is the left foot, and wisdom is the right foot" (*Yulei* 6; Zhu 1997: 100).[4]

p. 357 This is indeed a unique aspect of the Confucian account of virtues. Aristotle talks about the unity of the individual virtues, none of which are dominating in the whole system of virtues. In Confucianism in general and in ZHU Xi's neo-Confucianism in particular, however, other individual virtues are all led by, included in, and/or reflect some aspects of the dominant virtue, *ren*. Arguing against the Buddhist conception of human nature as empty, ZHU Xi claims that human nature is substantive (*shí* 實), as its content is nothing but these four cardinal Confucian virtues. Thus, in his second letter to CHEN Qizhi, ZHU Xi states that

> human nature is the undistinguished whole of the substance of the ultimate. Originally we cannot say anything about it. However, it entails ten thousand principles [*lǐ* 理], of which the most fundamental are the following four: *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom. Kongzi [Confucius] did not talk about human nature as much as Mengzi [Mencius] did. This is because everyone understood that human nature is good in Kongzi's time. So even though Kongzi did not explain it in detail, the idea of the goodness of human nature is there. However, heresies arose everywhere in Mengzi's time, which regarded human nature as not good. Mengzi was concerned that the truth was obscured and so he tried to make it clear. (*Wenji* 58; ZHU Xi 1996: 2977)

Here ZHU Xi makes it clear that "human nature entails … *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom," the four Confucian cardinal virtues. Thus, for ZHU Xi, human nature and virtues are identical in the sense that they are constituted by the same things: *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom. In this sense, he often talks about virtuous human nature (*déxìng* 德性) and virtues of human nature (*xìng zhī dé* 性之德).[5] In other words, human nature is virtuous, and virtues belong to human nature. In his view, it is precisely here that human beings are distinguished from animals. Commenting on *Mengzi* (*Mencius*) 6A3, ZHU Xi claims that

> Human nature is metaphysical (above the form), while the vital force is empirical (below the form). When born, human beings and non-human beings all have this principle as well as the vital force [*qì* 氣]. In terms of vital force, there is no distinction between human beings and non-human beings in their having perceptions and ability to move. In terms of principle, however, how can non-human beings be fully endowed with *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom? So no human's nature is not good. Humans are thus the most spirited among ten thousand things. (*Mengzi Jizhu*; Zhu 1994: 457)

Mengzi says that "the difference between humans and animals is very slight. Superior persons preserve it, while inferior people abandon it" (*Mengzi* 4B19). When a student asks what this "slight" thing that superior persons preserve and inferior people abandon is, ZHU Xi replies that it is what makes humans different from animals, not what humans and animals share. While to hear with ears, see with eyes, smell with nose, make noise ↳ with mouth, walk with feet, and carry things with hands are what humans and animals share,

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> what makes humans different from animals is that humans have *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom, so that as a son one can have filial love for parents, as a younger brother one can have respect for one's older brother, and etc. How can animals have them? (*Yulei* 57; Zhu 1997: 1203).

Precisely because this is the only distinction between humans and animals, on the one hand, "only when one can preserve this slight difference can one be distinguished from animals" (*Yulei* 59; Zhu 1997: 1240); and, on the other hand, "if one's heart-mind [whose substance is human nature] is obscured by selfish desires, one has become an animal" (*Yulei* 57; Zhu 1997: 1203).

However, when ZHU Xi claims that only human beings have these four virtues as their nature and animals do not have them, ZHU Xi uses the term "have" in a special sense, different from merely possessing in Aristotle's sense. In his discussion of a person's "having" knowledge, Aristotle makes a distinction between a person's merely possessing knowledge and the person's actually using it. A person asleep, mad, and drunken may still possess the knowledge he or she has previously acquired but is not able to use it (Aristotle: 1147a17–18). ZHU Xi makes a similar distinction between the two senses of "having" when he talks about human and nonhuman beings' having or not "having" the *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom in their nature. When ZHU Xi says that only human beings have these four elements, he means that only human beings can actually exercise them. However, when ZHU Xi says that animals do not have these four elements, he only means that they cannot exercise them and not that they do not possess them. For ZHU Xi, both human and nonhuman beings are endowed with both nature, or principle, and vital force. While they share the same nature, the vital forces they are respectively endowed with are different. As they are endowed with the same nature, they both have, in the sense of possessing, *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom; as they are endowed with different vital forces, the upright one for humans and the crooked one for animals, only humans have, in the sense of actually exercising, the four constituents of nature, and nonhuman beings do not have (also in the sense of exercising) them. Thus, in a letter to his teacher LǏ Tóng 李侗, ZHU Xi states that

> all living things between heaven and earth have the same root. Human beings, animals, and plants all have this principle, which is fully present in all of them…. This is *ren*. However, the vital force can be clear or turbid, and so their endowment in things can be either upright or crooked. Only human beings are endowed with the upright force and therefore are seen to exercise *ren*. Nonhuman beings are endowed with the crooked vital force and so, while possessing *ren*, are not aware of it and are not seen to exercise it. (Zhu 2010: 335)

To explain how different vital forces affect the same nature different beings are endowed with, ZHU Xi uses an analogy. The same nature of both human and nonhuman beings ↳ can be seen as clear water, while different vital forces can be seen as bowls with different colors in which water is placed: the same clear water appears white in a white bowl, black in a black bowl, and green in a green bowl (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 53). In a slightly different and perhaps more appropriate metaphor, ZHU Xi says that human nature is like the originally clear water. Put in a clean utensil, it remains clear; put in a dirty utensil, it is smelly; and put in a muddy utensil, it is turbid (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 66).

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Commenting on the letter, where ZHU Xi says, "this is *ren*," referring to the same principle shared by human beings, animals, and plants, his teacher LI Tong says that "there are things with blood and taking breath, and there are things without blood and taking no breath. [The distinction between these two] should also be carefully understood" (in Zhu 2010: 335). Taking a cue from his teacher, ZHU Xi points out that, although all human beings are endowed with upright vital force, and nonhuman beings are endowed with crooked vital force, there is still distinction between clear and turbid vital forces or between dark and bright vital forces. This distinction within the upright vital force leads to the distinction between good people and bad people, and this distinction within the crooked vital force leads to the distinction between animals and plants (and between the latter and nonliving things). We shall examine the distinction between good human beings and bad human beings in the next section. Here it is important to analyze ZHU Xi's view about the distinction between animals on the one hand and plants and nonliving things on the other. In ZHU Xi's view, although they are all endowed with crooked vital forces, the crooked vital forces that animals are endowed with are relatively clear and bright in comparison with, or, rather, not as turbid or dark as, the vital force of plants and nonliving beings. For this reason, the nature that animals are endowed with, the same nature that both human beings and other inanimate beings are endowed with, is not as completely blocked in animals as in plants and nonliving things (*Wenji* 59; Zhu 1996: 3067). For example, ZHU Xi observes that there is a slight bit of *ren* among parent tigers and wolves and their children, and there is a slight bit of rightness among members of bees and ants. Again, he explains it with a metaphor. The nature in animal is like a mirror that is dark except for a couple of small dots, which are still bright (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 52).[6]

IV. Explanatory, Not Foundational

Human nature for ZHU Xi is something metaphysical or, in Chinese terms, above the form (*xíngérshàng* 形而上). Thus, he states that "the great aspects of human nature, *ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom, are all above the form" (*Yulei* 117; Zhu 1997: 2533). In this sense, it is in contrast to *qi*, which is physical or, in Chinese terms, below the form (*xíngérxià* 形而下): "Human nature is above the form [metaphysical], while *qi* is below the form [physical]. What is above the form is heavenly principle, while what is below the form is dregs" (*Yulei* 5; Zhu 1997: 88). In this passage, ZHU Xi makes an important connection between human nature and
p. 360 principle (*li* 理): human ↳ nature is metaphysical, and what is metaphysical is principle. For this reason, ZHU Xi claims that CHENG Yi puts it best by saying that "human nature is principle." Part of what it means by "metaphysical" is that it does not belong to the sensible world. Thus, immediately after his appreciation of CHENG Yi's identification of human nature and principle, ZHU Xi states that "the principle has neither shape nor shade…. In human beings, humanity, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are all human nature. However, these four have no shape at all" (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 58). This forms a contrast with what is physical, which has shape and shade (*Yulei* 95; Zhu 1997: 2175). Since only things with shape and shade can be grasped by sense perceptions, ZHU Xi claims that "human nature cannot be grasped through shape and shadows. It is nothing but the principle. What you can see is human emotions, such as commiseration, shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and sense of right and wrong" (*Yulei* 6; Zhu 1997: 93).

We now have an overview of ZHU Xi's metaphysics of human nature. However, if human nature is metaphysical, what is metaphysical is without shape and shade, and what is without shape and shade cannot be known through our sense perception, then how do we know that there is such a thing called human nature, to say nothing about contents being good? Answering this question will also show whether ZHU Xi's metaphysics is explanatory or foundational. In other words, whether it is independently constructed so that everything else can be derived from it, or it is based on and aims to explain some of our empirical and practical intuitions. ZHU Xi's answer, however, is already implied in the last passage cited in the previous paragraph, where he makes the distinction between human nature and human emotions. *Ren*, rightness, propriety, and wisdom belong to human nature, while feelings of commiseration, shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and sense of right and wrong are their corresponding emotions. CHENG Yi, from whom ZHU Xi learns a great deal, says that "from [the feeling of] commiseration we can know [the nature of] *ren*" (*Yishu* 15; Cheng and Cheng 2004: 168). ZHU Xi regards what CHENG Yi says here as most insightful, as he (CHENG Yi) "does not say that the feeling of commiseration is *ren*, nor does he say that we can talk about humanity independently of commiseration" (*Yulei* 53; Zhu 1997: 1151). In ZHU Xi's view, while we cannot confuse human nature with human emotions, we cannot separate them from each other either:

> [W]hen there is a particular kind of human nature, there will be a particular kind of human emotion; because there is a particular kind of human emotion, we know that there is a particular kind of human nature. Because today we see that there is such kind of human emotion, we know that originally there is such kind of human nature. (*Yulei* 5; Zhu 1997: 81)

In his second letter replying to CHEN Qizhi, he generalizes what CHENG Yi says about *ren* and its corresponding emotion, commiseration, and applies it to other aspects of human nature and their respective emotions:

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> The reason we can examine principle is that we can examine it when it is aroused. Everything must have its origin and root. Although the principle of human nature is without shape, its aroused sprouts can be clearly examined. Thus, from the emotion of commiseration, we know that there must be humanity; from the feeling of shame and dislike, we know that there must be rightness, from the feeling of reverence, we know that there must be propriety, and from the feeling of right and wrong, we know that there must be wisdom. If there is no principle within, how can there be sprouts without? Because there are sprouts without, we can tell that there must be principle within. (*Wenji* 58; 1996: 2977)

So, although we do not have direct perception of human nature, we can still be sure that human nature is virtuous, because there are good human emotions that we can perceive. In ZHU Xi's view, human nature is the unaroused state of human emotions, while human emotions are the aroused state of human nature. Human nature is aroused by the things we perceive. For example, "seeing an infant about to fall into a well, one is aroused to have the feeling of alarm and commiseration, which mirrors *ren*. Seeing someone stealing, one is aroused to have the feeling of shame and dislike, which mirrors rightness" (*Yulei* 53; Zhu 1997: 1152); similarly, passing by a temple or pilgrimage, one is aroused to have the feeling of reverence, which mirrors the human nature of propriety. In short, when things outside excite our sense organs, what is inside, the human nature, will be aroused, and the result is human emotions (see *Wenji* 58; Zhu 1996: 2977). ZHU Xi uses several analogies to explain our knowledge of the goodness of human nature, which we cannot perceive directly, from the goodness of human emotions, which we can and do perceive directly. In one place, he says that it

> is just as we can tell that the origin of the water must be clear when we see that the water flowing from it is clear. The four sprouts are feelings, while human nature is principle. What arises is the emotion, while its root is human nature. [To know human nature from human emotions] is like knowing the shape [of a thing] from its shadows. (*Yulei* 5; Zhu 1997: 81)

In another place, he says that to see human nature from human emotions

> is like knowing how a mother must be from our knowledge of how her son is…. It is also like the buds of grasses and trees: from the buds above the ground we can tell that there must be roots underground. We do not say that the bud is already the root, nor can we know anything about the root independently from the bud." (*Yulei* 53; Zhu 1997: 1151)

It is interesting to note that, while the metaphor of bud or sprout is also used by Mencius, ZHU Xi uses it in a different way. For Mencius, it refers to the beginning from which complete human virtue can be developed. For ZHU Xi, however, it indicates that there must be a root from which the sprout grows.

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In short, we can have indirect knowledge of the goodness of human nature from our direct knowledge of the goodness of human emotions, just as we can have indirect knowledge of the origin of water from our direct knowledge of the water flowing from it, have indirect knowledge of a thing from our direct knowledge of its shadow, have indirect knowledge of the mother from our direct knowledge of her son, and have indirect knowledge of the root from our direct knowledge of its sprouts. Thus, it is clear that ZHU Xi's conception of human nature is not foundational but explanatory. In other words, ZHU Xu's metaphysical conception of human nature is not derived prior to or independent of our empirical knowledge; rather, it is dependent upon and aims to explain our empirical knowledge: human emotions must have their root, and the good human emotions indicate their root must be good, even though we cannot see the root or examine its goodness or badness.[7]

However, while ZHU Xi thinks that human nature is virtuous, he does acknowledge that human emotions can be either good or bad. Thus, he claims that "when aroused, human nature is human emotions. There are good emotions as well as bad emotions, although human nature is completely good" (*Yulei* 5; Zhu 1997: 82). If our metaphysical knowledge of human nature is the result of our

attempt to explain the human emotions that we can experience, and human emotions can be either good or bad, then it seems that ZHU Xi cannot claim that human nature is purely good. If from good human emotions we can infer that the human nature from which those emotions arise must be good, can we not equally legitimately infer that human nature must be bad from those bad human emotions? One way to answer this challenge is to build on ZHU Xi's analogy. From the bud sprouting above the ground, we can infer that there must be a root underground; yet, simply because there is no bud sprouting above the ground we cannot say that there must be no root underground. Similarly, because the bud sprouting above the ground is good, we can infer that its root must be good; yet, simply because the bud sprouting above the ground is not good we cannot infer that its root underground must be bad. While a bad root, as bad, cannot have a good sprout if at all, a good root does not guarantee a good sprout: there may be other reasons for there being no bud or for the bud to become bad (the soil in which it grows is not good or it is not properly fertilized, watered, or cultivated, for example). Of course, we cannot push this analogy too far, as it at least does not exclude the possibility that there is indeed no root when there is no bud or that the root is indeed bad when the bud is bad. Yet, ZHU Xi categorically excludes the possibility that human nature can be bad. Does this mean that, given the fact that some human emotions are actually bad, and there are actually bad people, ZHU Xi's metaphysical claim that human nature is virtuous is after all foundational and not explanatory?[8]

Here we have to realize that the existence of good human emotions is only one empirical fact that ZHU Xi's metaphysical conception of human nature is supposed to explain; it also attempts to explain another empirical fact: the distinction between bad human beings and animals. Although ZHU Xi, just like many other Confucians, claims that bad human beings as they are do not differ from beasts, he also makes it clear that bad human beings as they ought to be are different from animals. We normally say that bad human beings
p. 363 ought to be virtuous, but we do not say that animals ought to be virtuous, ↳ since "ought" implies "can": bad human beings as a matter of fact can be made virtuous, while animals as a matter of fact cannot. So, the question is why all human beings can be made virtuous but animals cannot. ZHU Xi's metaphysics of human nature is developed to also explain this fact. When a student asks why there is such a difference when everything has the same nature, ZHU Xi explains that "human nature can be either bright or obscured, the nature of all nonhuman beings is out of balance and blocked. The obscured human nature can be brightened, while the nature that is out of balance and blocked cannot be made clear" (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 51). In this passage, ZHU Xi not only makes the distinction between human beings and nonhuman beings but also the one between virtuous and therefore genuine human beings and evil and therefore nominal human beings. The difference between human and nonhuman beings is whether their nature is open or blocked. When it is blocked by unbalanced *qi*, it cannot be made open. That is why social animals cannot extend the four natural qualities, the same natural qualities that become human virtues when fully extended in human beings. The difference between good human beings and bad human beings is whether their nature is bright or dark. It is bright when it is not clouded by one's selfish desires; it is dark when it is clouded by one's selfish desires. In the latter case, the "human" being acts no differently than animals, as they have left unused the only unique human capacity, the ability to extend or expand (*tuī* 推) the four constituents of their nature to their full scope. However, the identity between nonvirtuous people and animals is only in terms of what they actually do and not in terms of what they can do. As ZHU Xi states in this passage, while blocked nature (in animals) cannot be opened, the nature darkened by selfish desires (in nonvirtuous human beings) can always be brightened. Thus, immediately following the passage above, when a student says that "when deeply sinking into the habit of doing immoral things, a person can never return to the right road," ZHU Xi disagrees, claiming that "everything depends upon the depth of knowledge and the amount of effort" (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 51–52). In other words, those who sink deep into immoral habits can still return to the right track, although they must make more effort than others. As long as they do as stated in one of the greatest Four Confucian Books, *Centrality and Commonality* (*Zhongyong* 中庸): "while other people only need make one effort, they need to make one hundred; while other people only need make ten, they need make one thousand"; then "however benighted they are, people can still be enlightened" (*Yulei* 4; Zhu 1997: 59). That is why ZHU Xi repeatedly quotes the following passage from the *Great Learning*, another of the Four Confucian Books: "inferior persons, when not noticed by others, do all immoral things possible. However, when they see superior persons, they will immediately hide their immoral side and pretend to be moral"; in ZHU Xi's view, their covering up their immoral behavior indeed shows that they are dishonest (see *Yulei* 15; Zhu 1997: 271); that their knowledge is not genuine (*Yulei* 16; Zhu 1997: 291); that they are self-deceptive (*Yulei* 16; Zhu 1997: 297); and that they are doubly wrong (to do immoral things is wrong, and to cover them up is wrong again) (*Yulei* 16, Zhu 1997: 298). However, for ZHU Xi, this very fact also shows that even a vicious person also knows what the characteristic way of being human is: the virtuous way (Zhu 1996: 1384). It is in this sense that they are different from beasts.[9]

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V. The Normative Function of the Explanatory Metaphysics

As we have seen, ZHU Xi's moral metaphysics, as an explanatory one, is immune to criticisms by postmetaphysical thinkers, as at least it will not become the conversation stopper. It does not start from some metaphysical premises, which only those who are committed to the Confucian tradition can understand and accept, and then derive from it what human beings should be or do. Rather, it starts from an observation of two empirical facts about human beings: (1) human beings naturally have such emotions as commiseration, shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and right and wrong, which may be called by other names in other traditions; (2) all human beings, however bad they may be, can become virtuous, while no animals, however good they may appear, can. In order to explain these two empirical facts, ZHU Xi provides a neo-Confucian metaphysics of human nature, which may or may not be accepted by people in other traditions, who may or may not want to provide an alternative metaphysical explanation of the same empirical facts. However, since they are attempting to explain the same empirical facts, they have a common ground for conversation and can argue whose explanation makes the better sense of what they aim to explain.

For this reason, after his criticism of such foundationalist philosophers as Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, and Kant, for whom our phenomenal selves should be regulated by a noumenal self behind them, and morality has to be based on a worldview that corresponds to the intrinsic human nature or human dignity or human right, even Rorty still considers it legitimate for philosophers

> to summarize our culturally influenced intuitions about the right thing to do in various situations. The summary is effected by formulating a generalization from which these intuitions can be deduced, with the help of noncontroversial lemmas. That generalization is not supposed to ground our intuitions, but rather to summarize them. (Rorty 1998: 171)

What Rorty has in mind here may not be exactly the same as, but certainly something rather close to, what I call explanatory metaphysics.

It might be asked, since such an explanatory metaphysics assumes the truth of knowledge to be explained, why we should engage ourselves in such an enterprise of metaphysics. There can be many answers, one of which is this. Many if not all of us have the inclination to make our beliefs coherent, because, as Rorty himself points out, "our minds are constrained (and in part constructed) by the need to tie our beliefs and desires together into a reasonably perspicuous whole" (Rorty 2000: 15). One way to make our belief coherent is to construct a general principle to underlie our various beliefs on particular things, or, to use Rorty's own words, to
p. 365 construct "models of such entities as 'the ↳ self,' 'knowledge,' 'language,' and 'nature,' 'God,' or 'history,' and then tinker … with them until they mesh with one another" (Rorty 1991: 192).

For Rorty, this is the only function an explanatory metaphysics can perform, a function that he thinks serves the private purpose of the metaphysician's self-fulfillment, which is in contrast to what he calls public utility. However, what I shall argue in this section is that, while ZHU Xi's metaphysical account of human nature, as an explanation of our empirical and practical intuitions, is presumably objective, it has an important normative function. This is parallel to the physicians' conception of human health. Such a conception, if plausible, must be objective, based on the scientific knowledge of our human body. However, clearly it also has a normative function, as it can help physicians to determine whether a given person's body is physically defective or not and therefore should be treated, if possible, or not. The reason is that, while the physician's conception of human health is an objective idea, it is not a statistical but a characteristic one: the type of health that is characteristic of human body, that is, the type of health that a human body, as a human body, can and should obtain and maintain. This does not mean that all or even most human beings have their healthy bodies. However, in the sense and to the degree that a human body comes short of this conception of health, this body is, in that sense and to that degree, defective and should be treated.

Similarly, ZHU Xi's metaphysical conception of human nature is also a characteristic rather than a statistical idea. It is in this sense that there is no contradiction at all between his claim that human nature is virtuous and his acknowledgment that some (and actually many) human beings are not virtuous. When he claims that human nature is virtuous, he does not mean that every individual human being is actually virtuous. There are people, actually many people, who are not virtuous, and in this sense many people are not characteristic but defective human beings. In other words, while it certainly does not mean that all human beings are going on in the characteristically human way, it also does not necessarily mean that most human beings are going on in the characteristically human

way. To determine whether a way is characteristic of the human species is to see what all humans *can* do that makes the human species different from other species, and not merely what human beings actually do that may or may not make the human species different from other species. So, Rosalind Hursthouse says something that ZHU Xi would certainly agree with: the notion of "characteristic" is "avowedly normative and is clearly going to yield judgments to the effect that many human beings are *not* going on 'in the way characteristic of the species' and are thereby defective human beings" (Hursthouse 1999: 223; see also Thompson 1995: 295; Wong 2006: 188).

The analogy between bodily health and virtuous human nature ceases to hold, however, in an important aspect, at least from ZHU Xi's point of view. While a person who is physically defective to a certain degree, with an incurable type of cancer, for example, may never be able to regain the physical ability characteristic of human beings, a person who is ethically defective, however serious it is, can always regain the ethical way characteristic of being human, as long as the person is willing to make a strong enough effort, since the ethical way characteristic of human beings, while not a way lived by all or even most human beings, is a way that all
p. 366 human beings can have and ought to have in order ↳ to become characteristic human beings. This can also explain why we do not condemn a person for his/her physical defects as we do for his or her ethical defects. For this reason, ZHU Xi also develops his philosophical or, rather, ethical pathology and therapeutics.

For ZHU Xi, the originally good human nature is manifested in the following seven feelings: joy, anger, grief, fear, love, hate, and desire, which may be either good or bad, depending upon whether they are manifested to the appropriate degree. If they are, they appear as commiseration, shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and sense of right and wrong, which are all good.[10] When they are not manifested to the right measure, either excessively or deficiently, they become bad. So what is important is to ensure that the seven feelings are properly issued from human nature so that they will always be in the right measure, which is what CHENG Yi calls "conforming [one's] feelings to nature" (*xìng qí qíng* 性其情), and to not allow the improperly issued feelings to cause harm to human nature, which is what CHENG Yi calls "to conform [one's] nature with [one's] feelings" (*qíng qí xìng* 情其性) (see Cheng and Cheng 2004: 204). The question is how to do that. In ZHU Xi's view, human nature is manifested in emotions through human heart-mind. It is in this sense that ZHU Xi makes a great use of ZHANG Zai's claim that "the heart-mind is the commander of both human nature and human feelings" (*Yulei* 5; Zhu 1997: 83). So, the relationship among human nature, feelings, and heart-mind in ZHU Xi is similar, in a certain sense, to the relationship among the three parts of the soul in Plato: the rational, the appetitive, and the spiritual (Plato 1980: 436–40). Just as the function of the spiritual part is to ensure that the appetitive part follows the rational part of the soul in Plato, the function of heart-mind is to ensure that human feelings are appropriately issued from human nature.

In ZHU Xi's view, while there is only one heart-mind, whose primary function is awareness, "if it follows the desire of ears or eyes, then it is merely human heart-mind (*renxin* 人心); if it follows rightness and principle, then it is *dao* heart-mind (*daoxin* 道心)" (*Yulei* 78; Zhu 1997: 1804). What ZHU Xi means by the *human* heart-mind here, when it is in contrast to the *dao* heart-mind, is indeed no longer a human heart-mind but is no different from the animal heart-mind, since it follows the lead of one's desires. It is in this sense that ZHU Xi claims that "the human heart-mind is one that does not discriminate between right and wrong, while *dao* heart-mind is one that does" (*Yulei* 12; Zhu 1997: 197). For this reason, ZHU Xi claims that, while human nature is all good, "the heart-mind can be either good or bad" (*Yulei* 5; Zhu 1997: 81). Indeed, it is precisely because the heart-mind can be either good or bad that feelings, which are issued from human nature through heart-mind, can be either good or bad. However, while the heart-mind that follows human nature, that is, the *dao* heart-mind, is always good, the heart-mind that follows one's desires, that is, the "human" heart-mind, is not necessarily bad. For example, while it is the "human" heart-mind to desire to eat when hungry and drink when thirsty,

> the dao heart-mind is not lost if one eats what one ought to eat and drinks what one ought to drink; the dao heart-mind is lost and is conquered by "human" heart-mind only if [for example] one drinks stolen water and eats food given in a humiliating way. (*Yulei* 78; Zhu 1997: 1807)

p. 367 Still, bad emotions and actions clearly all come from the "human" heart-mind, particularly when it conquers the dao heart-mind. The reason this happens is that the vital force that constitutes one's heart-mind is to a certain degree turbid.

So, what is important for ZHU Xi is to nurture the heart-mind so that it always follows the human nature; that is, it will be the *dao* heart-mind that guides the "human" heart-mind. To do so, ZHU Xi proposes a number of different measures, the most important of which are the following three, all with their origins from the *Mengzi*. First, "the best way to nurture the heart-mind is to have fewer desires" (*Mengzi* 7B25). When commenting on this passage, ZHU Xi points out that the desires that Mencius talks about here are not bad desires themselves, as otherwise Mencius would ask us to have none rather than few of them. Rather, they are such desires as to eat when hungry and drink when thirsty, which are things humans cannot go without. However, if one has excessive desires, one's dao heart-mind will be lost. Correspondingly, in order to preserve the dao heart-mind, one only needs to reduce but not eliminate such desires (*Yulei* 61; Zhu 1997: 1317–18). The second and the third are connected: to purify or nurture one's vital force and to hold firm on one's will (*chí zhì* 持志). Since one's desires are sometimes difficult to resist, it is important to have a strong will; and since the reason that one's *dao* heart-mind can be conquered by one's "human" heart-mind is that the vital force one is endowed with is not pure, it is important to purify it. However, these two are closely related to each other. On the one hand, ZHU Xi argues that the will is the command of the vital force: "as soon as the commander issues a command, all military units will follow. The only thing to be worried about is that one does not hold fast to the will" (*Yulei* 25; Zhu 1997: 587), and "if one can hold fast to his or her will, then the vital force can become clear and bright by itself"; in contrast, "when one is carried away by (bad) customs and conquered by (turbid) *qi*, one has no one to blame except one's own will" (*Yulei* 17; Zhu 1997: 333). On the other hand, one's will may also be weakened by uncontrolled vital force. For example, "if one seeks excessive joy and nothing but joy, or if one is excessively angry at all times, then one's vital force becomes violent … controlling one's will" (*Yulei*; Zhu 1997: 1106). So, it is also important to nurturing one's vital force.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that there are two types of metaphysics, one foundational and one explanatory. The difference between the two is that, while the former claims that metaphysics contains truths independent of our empirical and practical beliefs, which are to be derived from and determined by the independent metaphysical truths, the latter starts from and merely aims to provide an explanation of our empirical truths. I have argued that contemporary criticisms of metaphysics are largely targeted to the foundational metaphysics, while the explanatory variety can be immune to such criticisms. While explanatory metaphysics is quite
p. 368 unconventional in the Western philosophical tradition, it is the mainstream in the Chinese philosophical tradition. To ↳ illustrate it, I have examined ZHU Xi's metaphysics of human nature, which starts from and aims to explain the two empirical facts regarding (1) human emotions of commiseration, shame and dislike, deference and compliance, and sense of right and wrong and (2) the difference between humans (morally perfectible) and animals (morally not perfectible). For this reason, I have argued that ZHU Xi's metaphysics of human nature is explanatory and not foundational. Indeed, ZHU Xi himself is also self-conscious of what he is doing. In his letter to CHEN Qizhi, commenting on *Mengzi* 6A11, where Mencius says that because human emotion is good, I know that human nature is good, ZHU Xi claims that what Mengzi does is to know human nature "in a reverse way by tracing the [source] of human emotion (*sù qí qíng ér nì zhì* 遡其情而逆治)" (Zhu 1996: 58.2976). Since ZHU Xi here made a creative misinterpretation of the term *qing*, which for Mengzi means the reality or the state of affairs, and not emotions, it is better to see that ZHU Xi here is describing the methodology he follows in his own metaphysical account of human nature: it is explanatory and not foundational.[11] For postmetaphysical thinkers, while such an explanatory metaphysics is perhaps harmless, it may also be useless. For example, Rorty argues, such a metaphysics merely explains the desirability of our moral intuition, but explaining the desirability of our moral intuition, "by talk of 'fitting the world' or 'expressing human nature' is like explaining why opium makes you sleepy by talking about its dormitive power" (Rorty 1989, 8). However, I have argued that ZHU Xi's metaphysics of human nature performs an important normative function in our moral cultivation, a function as important as, if not more important than, the function that our physicians' conception of health performs in maintaining a good body.

Notes

1. The difference between MacIntyre and Taylor of course cannot be simplified as a difference between foundational metaphysics and explanatory metaphysics. While the one highlighted here is indeed an important one, it is much more complicated and involves many other issues, which, though important as well, are not relevant to the central theme of this chapter. For a more comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Huang (2001: 42–50, 57–102).

2. A question may be raised regarding the difference between foundational and explanatory metaphysics drawn here. On the one hand, it seems that both metaphysics may end up with disagreement. This is true. However, in explanatory metaphysics, people can be satisfied with their disagreement. Even though they start to argue with each other about whose metaphysics better explains, if at all, their shared moral and political ideas, from which they can learn from each other, they may end up realizing that several metaphysics can provide equally good explanations of these same moral and political ideas and, thus, embracing a pluralism. Foundational metaphysicians, however, believe that, before we can talk about any moral and political ideas, we need to first establish a religious and metaphysical conception of human goodness, and since different people have different religions and metaphysics, and there is no shared criterion to judge which one is better (which is different from explanatory metaphysics, since the latter is
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supposed to explain the shared moral and political ideas, and so there is a criterion to evaluate different metaphysics: ↳ which can and which cannot provide an explanation, and which explanation is better), no agreement on such metaphysical and religious matters can be reached, and thus moral and political discourse cannot even get off the ground. On the other hand, it might be asked: if explanatory metaphysics can reasonably assume the agreement on social and political matters, why is it wrong for foundational metaphysics to assume the agreement on religious and metaphysical matters. The answer is this. First, it is a matter of fact that we do have a lot of shared moral and political ideas on such fundamental matters as slavery and religious persecution on the one hand and freedom and equality on the other, but we don't have similarly shared religious and metaphysical ideas; second, while religious and metaphysical disagreement is harmless and even desirable, moral and (particularly) political disagreement, unless as a way to reach agreement, would be a disaster, as a well-ordered society must be based on universally (within the society) applicable laws and social policy; third, while religious and metaphysical disagreements are often fundamental, moral and political disagreements are often disagreements on the relative weight of some values (for example, between individuality and community, between autonomy and mutual concern, and between freedom and equality) that are cherished by all sides. For more detailed discussion on this issue, see Huang (2001: 172–84).

3. Sometimes translated as "benevolence," among others, *ren* is best translated as "humanity" in the context of classical Confucianism. Neo-Confucians, including ZHU Xi, uses the term in a similar sense. However, as we are going to see momentarily, for neo-Confucians, *ren* also exists in nonhuman beings, and thus it is odd to translate it as "humanity," even though we can still say that *ren* is unique to human beings in a sense to be apparent in the ensuing discussion. For this reason, I will leave the character not translated but transliterated.

4. Puzzled by this, a student asks how to explain the primacy of the virtue of *ren*. ZHU Xi replies, "This is merely an analogy. Yet, even though one hand does not include the four limbs, still when we talk about hand and foot, hand is before foot, and when we talk about left and right, left is before right" (*Yulei* 6; Zhu 1997: 100). So the left hand, which represents the virtue of *ren*, is still primary. (Note: in Chinese, we always say "hand and foot," never "foot and hand," and always "left and right" and never "right and left.")

5. About the virtuous human nature, ZHU Xi says that "generally speaking, humans' virtuous nature (*dexing*) naturally has these four: humanity … rightness … propriety … and wisdom" (*Yulei* 6; Zhu 1997: 100); and about virtues of human nature, he states that "humanities, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are all virtues of human nature (*xing zhi de*)" (*Yulei* 101; Zhu 1997: 2324).

6. So, regarding human nature, sometimes ZHU Xi says that it is different from the nature of animals, sometimes he says that it is the same as the nature of animals, and sometimes he says that, while same, the nature is complete in human beings but incomplete in animals. This has caused some confusion among scholars, who believe that there is some kind of incoherence among these views, which can be explained away only by regarding them as views that ZHU Xi successively adopts at different stages of the development of his philosophy (see, for example, Chen 2000: 124–36). However, as I have shown earlier, these views are entirely coherent if we pay attention to the different senses in which he uses them.

7. It is here important to make a distinction between the order of knowing and the order of being. Foundational

metaphysics and explanatory metaphysics differ in terms of the order of knowing: according to the former, our knowledge of the metaphysical precedes our knowledge of the empirical/practical; according to the latter, our
p. 370 knowledge of the ↳ empirical/practical precedes our knowledge of the metaphysical. In terms of the order of being, there is no distinction between foundational and explanatory metaphysics, as for both the metaphysical is prior to the empirical/practical.

8. CHEN Lai notices this problem, and he imagines a few logically possible ways of solving it, ultimately concluding that these are not ways ZHU Xi actually attempts to use to solve the problem, to say nothing of the fact that these ways are themselves problematic (see Chen 2000: 211–12).

9. ZHU Xi's view on this issue is clear, at least when he is not concerned with *Analects* 17.3, where Kongzi says that only the wise above and stupid below do not change. CHENG Yi provides a revolutionary interpretation of this passage by saying that everyone, including the utmost evil person, can become good if the person makes an effort, and what Confucius means is merely that anyone who does not make an effort cannot become good (for an extensive discussion of CHENG Yi's interpretation of this *Analects* passage, see Huang [2008]). Deeply indebted to CHENG Yi and yet not willing to contradict what Kongzi clearly says, ZHU Xi becomes hesitant. In his own comment on this passage in his *Collected Commentary on the Analects*, he first states that "among the similar material endowments of humans, there are some definitely good and some definitely bad, which cannot be changed by human efforts" and then cites a long passage from CHENG Yi to the effect that even the most stupid people can become wise if they make an effort (Zhu 1994: 246). When a student points out to him the apparent incoherence between his own statement and the long quote from CHENG Yi, ZHU Xi says that we should follow CHENG Yi, soon after he says that "there are some stupid people who just cannot be changed" and immediately before he further says that "while what Confucius says is complete, CHENG Yi has grasped only seventy percent" (*Yulei* 29; Zhu 1997: 1053). QIAN Mu argues, unconvincingly to me, that these sayings reflect ZHU Xi's views at different stages of the development of his philosophy, and ZHU Xi eventually sides with Confucius and deviates from CHENG Yi, which he rarely does (see Qian 2011: 35).

10. ZHU Xi is not entirely clear about the precise relationship between the four emotions, which are purely good, and seven feelings, which can be either good or bad. In one place, he matches the four emotions with the seven feelings in this way: the right degree of joy, anger, love, and hate are from *ren* and rightness and so appear as emotions of commiseration and sense of shame and dislike; the right amount of feeling grief and fear is from propriety and so appears as deference and compliance; and the right amount of feeling desire is from wisdom and so appears to be the sense of right and wrong (*Yulei* 87; Zhu 1997: 2015). However, he not only acknowledges, in the same place, that such a match is very difficult or even not possible to do but even claims, in a different place, that "four emotions are issued from the principle, while seven feelings are issued from the vital force" (*Yulei* 53; Zhu 1997: 1160). Indeed, these two views later became the sources of the views held, respectively, by the two sides in the famous debate on the issue of four emotions and seven feelings in Korean Confucianism (see Kalton et al., 1994). While it goes beyond the topic of this chapter, it is my opinion that the view that seven feelings match the four emotions, in one way or another, better fits ZHU Xi's overall moral psychology.

11. LIU Shuxian thus perceptively points out that "the methodology that ZHU Xi uses is an *a posteriori* one: tracing the origin from the flow (*you liu su yuan* 由流溯源)" (Liu 1995: 217; see also Chen 2000: 211).

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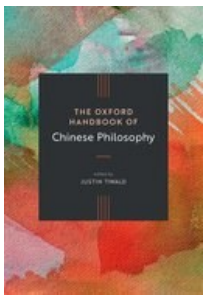

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CHAPTER

19 Xunzi and the Authority of Tradition

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Abstract

This chapter attempts to bring early Confucian ideas into dialogue with contemporary Western epistemology. On the Western side, epistemologists have recently produced numerous writings about forming beliefs based on the say-so of others, especially others acknowledged as "experts" or "authorities" on some topic. Here is it proposed that Linda Zagzebski's 2012 book *Epistemic Authority* can be very helpful for thinking about the Confucian texts, and in particular the ancient Confucian thinker Xunzi, whom English-language scholarship has often cast as particularly stressing deference to authority, such as Homer Dubs's claim that Xunzi advocates a kind of "authoritarianism." While much scholarly discussion has concerned political authority in Xunzi's thought, Xunzi also stresses deference to epistemic authority, especially as embodied in certain traditions, and most specifically in the rituals valued by the Confucians. This latter deference is the focus of this chapter, which argues that comparisons with Zagzebski reveal that Xunzi can offer a more substantial defense of trust in and deference to the epistemic authority of tradition than is normally recognized. After articulating this defense, the chapter also identifies a potential shortcoming in it and considers the implications for Zagzebski's view, insofar as her position has similarities with Xunzi's.

Keywords: : Xunzi, Linda Zagzebski, ritual, epistemology, trust
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I. Introduction

This chapter attempts to bring early Confucian ideas into dialogue with contemporary Western epistemology. On the Western side, epistemologists have recently produced numerous writings about forming beliefs based on the say-so of others, especially others acknowledged as "experts" or "authorities" on some topic. Of these writings, I will focus on Linda Zagzebski's book *Epistemic Authority* because her view is, I hope to show, very helpful for thinking about the Confucian texts. On the Confucian side, I will focus on Xunzi,[1] whom English-language scholarship has often cast as particularly stressing deference to authority, such as Homer Dubs's claim that Xunzi advocates a kind of "authoritarianism."[2] While much discussion has concerned political authority in Xunzi's thought, Xunzi also stresses deference to epistemic authority, especially as embodied in certain traditions, and this latter deference shall be my focus. Comparisons with Zagzebski, I argue, reveal that Xunzi can offer a more substantial defense of deference to the epistemic authority of tradition than is normally recognized. After articulating this defense, I will also identify a shortcoming in it and consider the implications for Zagzebski's view, insofar as it resembles Xunzi's.

In this manner, I hope to show how contemporary Western epistemology can help us better appreciate certain aspects of Xunzi's thought, and how insights gained through this process might in turn challenge contemporary Western epistemologists. I will start with a highly selective review of Zagzebski's ideas, concentrating on those points that will resonate with Xunzi.

II. Zagzebski on Trust in Epistemic Authority

Zagzebski aims to repudiate what she calls "epistemic egoism," which in its extreme form claims that "I have reason to believe *p* only when the direct exercise of my faculties gives me reason to believe *p*," or in a more moderate form claims that "the fact that another person has a … belief can give [one] grounds for believing it, but only if, by using [one's] own faculties, [one] has grounds for believing the source is reliable" (Zagzebski 2012: 52, 54). She offers both a negative argument against epistemic egoism and a positive argument for taking others' belief in *p* as a reason to believe *p* oneself, without needing to determine that the others are reliable. Here I will focus on her positive argument.

Zagzebski begins that argument with three claims: (i) people have a natural, prereflective desire for truth; (ii) people prereflectively believe that it is possible for them to satisfy that desire at least to some extent; and (iii) along with this belief and underlying it, people have a prereflective trust that their own epistemic faculties can in general get them the truth. Of these claims, the last is particularly significant for Zagzebski's overall argument. She elaborates,

> [W]hen I trust x for purpose y, (1) I *believe* x will get me y, (2) I *feel* trusting towards x for that purpose, and (3) I *treat* x as if it will get me y. I do not claim that all three components of trust are necessary in every instance, but I think that they are present in standard cases…. I think that the three components of trust are included in my prereflective trust in my faculties. I *treat* them as if they will get me to the truth, I *believe* that they will get me to the truth, and in addition, I *feel* a trusting emotion towards my faculties in that respect. (Zagzebski 2012: 37–38)

Whereas other prereflective tendencies might not survive reflective scrutiny, Zagzebski thinks that this one does. In an argument that I will not reconstruct here, she claims that having a measure of epistemic self-trust is the most rational response to the fact that we have no noncircular way of confirming the reliability of our epistemic faculties. Furthermore, she takes a person's self-trust to be stronger and even more rational when the person is being epistemically conscientious, that is, "using [their] faculties to the best of [their] ability in order to get the truth" (Zagzebski 2012: 48), and she takes such self-trust to provide a reason (or in other words, a degree of justification) for beliefs acquired through epistemic conscientiousness.

After arguing that epistemic self-trust is rational, Zagzebski argues that it is likewise rational to grant epistemic trust to others:

> When I am conscientious I will come to believe that other normal, mature humans have the same natural desire for truth and the same general powers and capacities ↳ that I have. If I have a general trust in myself and I accept the principle that I should treat like cases alike, I am rationally committed to having a general trust in them also. (Zagzebski 2012: 55)

Note that the trust Zagzebski describes here is only a *general* trust. It can be weakened or strengthened in relation to particular cases. Among the latter is the case of others who are themselves epistemically conscientious; just as we consider ourselves more trustworthy when we are being conscientious, so too we should regard others as more trustworthy when *they* are being conscientious (Zagzebski 2012: 56–57).

According to Zagzebski, trust in others gives one a prima facie (i.e., defeasible) reason to believe what they believe, and the strength of this reason varies in part with one's assessment of their epistemic efforts. As Zagzebski puts it, "The fact that someone whom I conscientiously believe is conscientious believes *p* gives me a stronger *prima facie* reason to believe *p* [than the case where the person is not conscientious]" (Zagzebski 2012: 68). However, the strength of this prima facie reason can also vary with one's assessment of the person's likelihood to obtain true beliefs for a given domain. For one can also think that others, even those equally conscientious as oneself, may still—due to differences in experience or training—have a greater chance of getting the truth than one would through one's own conscientious efforts. In such cases, the prima facie reason to believe what the other person believes is even stronger still.

This last scenario is how Zagzebski construes the case of others who can be considered as being epistemic authorities or having epistemic authority. In those instances, we have an especially strong (but still defeasible) reason for believing what the authorities believe, and Zagzebski presents two slightly different principles intended to capture this reason:

> *Justification Thesis 1 for the Authority of Belief (JAB 1)*
>
> The authority of another person's belief for me is justified by my conscientious judgment that I am more likely to form a true belief and avoid a false belief if I believe what the authority believes than if I try to figure out what to believe myself.
>
> *Justification Thesis 2 for the Authority of Belief (JAB 2)*
>
> The authority of another person's belief for me is justified by my conscientious judgment that I am more likely to form a belief that survives my conscientious self-reflection if I believe what the authority believes than if I try to figure out what to believe myself. (Zagzebski 2012: 110–11)

We need not worry about the difference between the two formulations for now, other than noting that because JAB 2 does not invoke notions of truth, it can apply in cases where truth is not a relevant value (or to people who reject notions of truth). More important for present purposes is that both versions base the justification for believing what the authority believes on the fact that this will help
p. 378 one achieve something at which one already aims, though Zagzebski also allows that the way in which following the ↳ authority helps one achieve this aim (and indeed, how to properly conceive one's aim) may not be fully apparent until after one has already relied—perhaps extensively so—on the authority's judgment.[3] The significance of these points will become clear when we turn to Xunzi.

In the meantime, Zagzebski expands her approach from trust in belief to include trust in testimony. While much philosophical discussion of testimony has focused on verbal communication, Zagzebski begins with an intriguing example designed to make one consider a broader range of cases:

> [W]e cannot trust someone else's belief without finding out what it is, and we cannot do that except through the mediation of speech or writing or some other behavior. The behavior need not be verbal. For instance, I may want to attend a lecture but might not be sure where the lecture room is. I may then follow a group of people whom I know are going to the lecture. I assume that their behavior indicates their belief about the location of the room, and when I do so, it is their belief that I take to be authoritative. (Zagzebski 2012: 120)

Now this particular example does not actually constitute an instance of taking a belief on the authority of testimony for Zagzebski, because here one simply infers the belief from the behavior, whereas she takes testimony normally to involve an act of "telling" (though not necessarily through verbal means) by one party toward another, wherein the party revealing its belief is doing so intentionally and is asking to be believed and, as a result, bears some responsibility for the other's beliefs formed on that basis. On Zagzebski's view,

> [T]rust in belief … is merely trust in accuracy…. But trust in testimony involves trust in sincerity as well as trust in accuracy. When A tells B that *p*, A decides to tell B that *p*, which means that it is open to A to speak what she takes to be false or in some other way to mislead B. So if B trusts A's testimony, he must trust both A's accuracy and A's sincerity, and in telling B that *p*, A assumes responsibility to B for both her accuracy and sincerity. (Zagzebski 2012: 126)

Zagzebski argues that, as with trust in others' accuracy, there is also a prima facie (but again, defeasible) reason to trust in their sincerity (Zagzebski 2012: 127). When one conscientiously trusts a source's accuracy and sincerity, then one can be justified in adopting a belief on the authority of that source's testimony, a point that Zagzebski sums up in two principles, parallel to JAB 1 and JAB 2:

> *Justification Thesis 1 for the Authority of Testimony (JAT 1)*
>
> The authority of a person's testimony for me is justified by my conscientious judgment that I am more likely to satisfy my desire to get true beliefs and avoid false beliefs if I believe what the authority tells me than if I try to figure out what
p. 379 to believe myself. ↳
>
> *Justification Thesis 2 for the Authority of Testimony (JAT 2)*
>
> The authority of another person's testimony for me is justified by my conscientious judgment that if I believe what the authority tells me, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection better than if I try to figure out what to believe myself. (Zagzebski 2012: 133)

It is worth adding that for Zagzebski, the "telling" that generates this justification need not be a personal interaction between the two parties but can be conveyed indirectly, such as a "telling" conveyed in a text received by people far removed in space and time from the authority, or a "telling" conveyed via "chains of testimony" from person to person that stretch across generations and geography.

This last case is noteworthy because it involves multiple people in generating the justification for the belief adopted on the basis of testimony, and this alternative model of epistemic authority is especially important to Zagzebski. Whereas in JAB/JAT 1 and JAB/JAT 2, the epistemic authority is an individual, Zagzebski expands her approach to cases where the epistemic authority is a community. In particular, drawing on work in social epistemology that treats a community as an "extended self" possessing justification and/or knowledge not reducible to the justification and/or beliefs possessed by any of its individual members, Zagzebski offers the following communal versions of JAB/JAT 1 and JAB/JAT 2:

> *Justification of Communal Epistemic Authority 1 (JCEA 1)*
>
> The authority of my community is justified for me by my conscientious judgment that I am more likely to believe the truth and avoid falsehood if I believe what We believe than if I try to figure out what to believe in a way that is independent of Us.
>
> *Justification of Communal Epistemic Authority 2 (JCEA 2)*
>
> The authority of my community is justified for me by my conscientious judgment that if I believe what We believe, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection better than if I try to figure out what to believe in a way that is independent of Us. (Zagzebski 2012: 155)

As Zagzebski goes on to explain, these principles do not presuppose any particular way in which "what We believe" is to be determined; it need not be a matter of majority opinion, nor need it be determined by any democratic process. Zagzebski also leaves relatively open what constitutes a community, but she explicitly allows that, as with testimony, such communities can be extended both in space and time, as when she speaks of communities that last "for many generations" (Zagzebski 2012: 156), with communities of religious believers as her primary example.

To sum up, Zagzebski argues that, based on the justifiability of self-trust, it can be justifiable to trust others and to adopt beliefs on
p. 380 their authority, whether those others be single individuals or whole communities, whether one acquires information about their ↳

beliefs through observation of their words and deeds or through testimony on their part, and whether the testimony is offered directly or indirectly. With these elements of Zagzebski's view before us, let us now turn to Xunzi.

III. Xunzi on the Justification of Deference to Tradition

For those unfamiliar with Xunzi, I start with some basic information.[4] Xunzi advocates certain moral and political views and practices but does not present these as innovations on his part. Rather, he believes they originated with ancient sages and sage kings long before his time. Furthermore, Xunzi takes the preservation and transmission of this ancient inheritance to be the distinctive achievement of Confucian thinkers. (Although "Confucian" is the conventional translation for the Chinese term *rú* 儒, Xunzi views Confucius as merely one especially outstanding *ru*, rather than as the originator of the positions that Xunzi advocates, so translating *ru* as "Confucian" in discussing Xunzi's thought is somewhat inaccurate, and I will henceforth leave it untranslated.) In Xunzi's day, the Warring States period, many people—rulers, ordinary folk, and intellectuals—rejected the ancient approaches upheld by the *ru*, on the grounds that those approaches were inapplicable in current times, misguided in principle, and/or unfaithful to the actual deeds and thoughts of the past sages.

Xunzi fights against such attacks, and in doing so he defends not only the correctness of how the *ru* understand the past, but also the continuing value of the views and practices of the sages as understood by the *ru*.[5] To this extent, Xunzi is defending a tradition of thought and action from the past, as well as a tradition of interpretation of the past. Here I want to focus on this defense of tradition, especially tradition in the former sense. In particular, among that tradition's most important parts are the rituals (*lǐ* 禮) that Xunzi believes were created and handed down by the sages. As we shall see, he regards the rituals as endowed with a kind of epistemic authority, and I want to examine the justification that Xunzi can offer people to defer to this authority.[6]

At the outset, one must note that Xunzi explicitly denies that the mere fact of being ancient suffices to justify such deference. In one place, Xunzi discusses various sources of "fixation" (*bì* 蔽) that lead people to make erroneous judgments, and he remarks that "The ancient past can be a source of fixation" (*gǔ wéi bì* 古為蔽, HKCS 21/102/13).[7] In other words, the antiquity of some view or practice is not by itself always a reason to follow it, and sometimes following the ancient past can be the *wrong* thing to do. Hence, in asking people to defer to the authority of tradition, Xunzi cannot be relying simply on its long history.

Instead, when presenting a case for abiding by ritual, Xunzi most often appeals to the effects that following and deferring to the tradition would have for current people, but there is a curious twist to the way he does so. Consider the following passage:

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> The natural disposition of people is that for food they want meats, … for travel they want chariots and horses, and moreover they want the riches of surplus wealth and accumulated goods…. Now for their livelihood, people know how to raise chickens, dogs, and pigs … but for their food they do not dare to have wine and meat…. Those who are thrifty have caches in cabinets and chests, but for their travels they do not dare to have chariots and horses. Why is this? It is not because they do not want them. Can it be for any other reason than that considering the long run and reflecting on the consequences they fear they would have no way to continue in these things? Therefore, they live frugally and constrain their desires, and they store up and stockpile things in order to continue in them. Is not consideration of the long run and reflecting on consequences thus best for oneself? … How much more important are the way of the former kings … and the proper social divisions as contained in … their rituals and music! These are originally the greatest considerations under Heaven. For the sake of all the populace under Heaven, they consider the long run and reflect on consequences in order to protect them for ten thousand ages. Their effects stretch over a long time. Their power to comfort is abundant. Their accomplishments fill up even remote and distant places. No one but a thoroughly cultivated gentleman can understand (*zhī* 知) them. (HKCS 4/16/5–13)

Here Xunzi starts by noting how people benefit from adopting policies of self-restraint in light of "considering the long run and reflecting on the consequences." He then treats the traditions handed down from the "former kings" (i.e., the ancient sages) as having effects similar to but even greater than such policies; they "protect" and "comfort" people more, and not only within an individual's own lifetime but also across "ten thousand" generations. Xunzi is thus appealing to people's prudential self-concern as a reason to follow the tradition. Yet, at the end, he also claims that only a "thoroughly cultivated gentleman"[8] can understand what the traditions

do for people. Xunzi repeats this last claim a number of times,[9] and what is especially significant about it is that Xunzi thinks one can become a cultivated gentleman (or sage) only by *first* practicing the rituals and following the tradition. Thus, although he offers those who do not already submit to the tradition a reason to do so, he simultaneously thinks that this reason cannot be (fully) grasped without having already submitted to the tradition.[10]

To this extent, Xunzi asks people to adopt a view of the rituals and the tradition of which they are part—namely, that they will serve people's interests—prior to doing what would be necessary for them to determine this for themselves. Or in Zagzebski's terms, Xunzi asks people to *trust* in the tradition, at least in two of the three senses she identifies (see Section II of this chapter for comparison): he asks them to *believe* that the tradition will serve their interests and to *treat* the tradition that way by following it in pursuing their interests,[11] and he expects that trust to be completely validated only after a long process that at least partially alters their view of things.[12]

While the issue can be framed in terms of "trust" for Zagzebski, though, one might still wonder whether such a description is really appropriate for Xunzi. In fact, such a way of thinking is not completely alien to Xunzi. We can see this by considering a passage
p. 382 where Xunzi discusses how to become a true king. The title "king" (*wáng* 王) ↳ originally belonged solely to the head of the Zhou dynasty, who claimed to rule "all under Heaven" (*tiānxià* 天下), but the dynasty's power waned after the eighth century BCE, and in Xunzi's day the title had been usurped by local lords who were contesting for overall dominance. Thus, in addressing actual or potential rulers and explaining how to become a true "king," Xunzi appeals to their desires to be powerful and to have legitimate command over others. As one might expect, he claims that the rituals and other traditions of the sages will allow rulers to achieve these aims. Particularly noteworthy, though, is his wording in this argument:

> [H]ow can there be any state that securely remains firm for a thousand years? I say: Take hold of a model that is trustworthy for a thousand years to support it, and then run the state together with men who are trustworthy for a thousand years. [Perhaps someone might ask:] But people do not even have longevity of a hundred years, so how could there be men who are trustworthy for a thousand years? I say: Those who use a model that is trustworthy for a thousand years to support themselves are men who are trustworthy for a thousand years. And so, if one runs the state together with gentlemen who have accumulated cultivation in ritual and the standards of righteousness, then one will become a true king. (HKCS 11/51/5–8)

Here, Xunzi invokes the notion of *xìn* 信, "trustworthiness," and while we cannot treat any translation as an exact equivalent for a given Chinese word, the semantic range of *xin* as used in the *Xunzi* and a number of other early Chinese texts clearly does overlap to a large degree with a common understanding of the English words "trust" and "trustworthy"; in particular, *xin* most often involves reference to people's beliefs about what was, is, or will be the case, in advance of or in the absence of some directly observable confirmation.[13] In this case, ritual and the standards of righteousness are presented as the "model" that is *xin* ("trustworthy"), and what is implied in this labeling and serves as the basis for it is the thought that a ruler should believe (and behave as though) these standards will be effective for maintaining his state even before he has seen them succeeding at this. Indeed, Xunzi claims that these models are effective for maintaining a state "for a thousand years" while in the same breath admitting that no one could live long enough to personally see this confirmed.[14] For this reason, even if Xunzi's conception of *xin* does not match Zagzebski's notion of "trust" exactly, the fact that he uses what is probably the closest Chinese analog to the word "trust," and on grounds similar to what underwrites Zagzebski's employment of "trust," to describe what he takes as the proper attitude toward tradition is sufficient, I think, to show that he *does* conceive of deference to tradition (especially by those not already committed to it) in terms of what can reasonably be called "trust" in a general sense. Zagzebski's way of thinking is thus not so foreign to him after all, and on this basis it is not unwarranted to use her analysis as a tool for thinking about his discussions of deference to tradition.

Before proceeding along that line, however, let me note one facet of Xunzi's thought for which Zagzebski's views may not fit so
p. 383 well. As mentioned earlier, Zagzebski thinks ↳ that trust often involves an emotional component. Xunzi, though, claims that the rituals and traditions of the sage kings in many ways go against our natural inclinations:

> Now people's nature is such that when hungry they desire satiety … and when tired they desire rest. This is people's inborn disposition and nature. Now if people are hungry and see food but do not dare to eat first, that will be because there are some to whom they will give way. If people are tired but do not dare to seek rest, that will be because there are

> some for whom they will substitute themselves. When a son gives way for his father [or] … stands in for his father, … these two kinds of conduct both go against one's nature and are at odds with one's inborn dispositions. Nevertheless, they are the way of a filial child, and the proper form and order contained in ritual and the standards of righteousness. (HKCS 23/114/2–6)

The word translated as "inborn disposition" (*qíng* 情) often connotes emotion in particular,[15] and so although here it is discussed solely in terms of desires, the claim that ritual and the standards of righteousness conflict with one's inborn dispositions is likely intended to include not just desiderative states, but also affective ones. Hence, while Xunzi asks those not yet cultivated to trust in the rituals and traditions of the sages, he probably does not expect them to readily feel any such trust. Thus, the trust that Xunzi requests from the uncultivated, such as when he asks rulers to trust in the tradition, is fairly significant; it is trust that may well run *counter* to what one feels and rest largely on belief instead.[16]

When we consider the nature of this trust in tradition, Zagzebski's model is particularly useful, because it helps us see how Xunzi has the elements for a fairly sophisticated defense of such trust. For contrast, consider what Dubs says: "Like Augustine, [Xunzi] saw that the only safe foundation for authoritarianism is the belief that human nature is fundamentally evil, for then man cannot trust his own reasoning" (Dubs 1956: 216).[17] On Dubs's view, the trust in authority demanded by Xunzi involves the surrender of reason and hence is not a trust that can be reflectively justified from the uncultivated person's own standpoint.[18] As a general account of trust in authority, this view is precisely what Zagzebski aims to combat, and so her work can clarify what is problematic in reading Xunzi that way.

Let us start with a passage that offers another perspective on the authority of tradition in Xunzi's view. So far, I have left the kind of authority unspecified, but the text makes clear that at least one aspect of that authority is epistemic authority. Chapter 17 contains the following passage, which bears an interesting resemblance to Zagzebski's example (cited in Section II of this chapter) of following people to a lecture because one treats as authoritative their beliefs about where the lecture is located:

> Those who cross waters mark out the deep places, but if the markers are not clear, people will fall in. Those who order the people mark out the Way, but if the markers are not clear, there will be chaos. The rituals are those markers. To reject ritual is to bemuddle the world, and to bemuddle the world is to create great chaos. (HKCS 17/82/22 – 17/83/1)

The metaphor of the depth markers is a rich one that I will dwell on for a while. First, to cross the river by following the markers, rather than testing the depths oneself, is to trust in those markers,[19] and by extension the judgment of the people who planted them. Furthermore, the trust is clearly epistemic in character: the markers indicate what is safe or dangerous, so in following the markers, one is adopting a certain belief on their authority. In terms of this metaphor, ritual—and more generally the traditions handed down from the sages—are not ends in themselves. Rather, they provide information about the Way, that is, the proper way to live and organize society, which is distinct from the rituals in the same way that the safe path across the river is distinct from the signs marking it out. The authority of ritual and tradition is to this extent likewise an epistemic authority, and to believe on the basis of that authority is (at least in part) to exercise epistemic trust.[20]

We can ask, though, what justifies such trust for Xunzi, and considering the parallels with Zagzebski reveals that he makes a number of assumptions similar to hers. For instance, as noted earlier, one step Zagzebski takes is to argue that if we judge others as being similar to ourselves in their epistemic faculties, then (assuming we trust our own faculties) we have reason to trust their beliefs. On reflection, it is not hard to see that an analogous thought must also be implicit in Xunzi's metaphor of the depth markers in the river, namely, that there is similarity between the person who planted the markers and the person following them. For if those who planted the markers were, say, giants, and what was safely shallow for them could still be dangerously deep for the rest of us, then one would not have reason to trust in the markers. The similarity presumed here is not a similarity in epistemic faculties but, rather, a similarity in interests and in what counts as safety and harm. Nevertheless, it is a similarity supporting epistemic trust in the markers.

To translate from the metaphor back to the issue of trust in tradition, when Xunzi urges people to trust in and follow the rituals, he must be implicitly relying on the idea that they are similar enough to those who previously followed the way of life outlined by the rituals that the rituals will bring similar results for them as well. However, this view is not merely implicit—Xunzi states it explicitly:

> With regard to endowment, nature, intelligence (*zhi* 知), and capabilities, the gentleman and the petty man are one and the same. Both like honor and hate disgrace. Both like what is beneficial and hate what is harmful … but they differ in the means by which they seek these things. The petty man … is sure not to get what he likes, but is sure to meet with what he hates. On the other hand, the gentleman … is sure to get what he likes, and sure not to meet with what he hates…. The petty men all stretch their necks and stand on their toes to look at [the gentleman], saying, "In his endowment, nature, intelligence, and capabilities, he originally had what it takes to be a worthy." They do not know that there is no difference between themselves and him. It is only that the gentleman refines these things to a fitting end, and the petty man refines these things to the wrong end.
>
> So, if you thoroughly investigate the intelligence and capabilities of the petty man, you will know that he has them in
p. 385 abundance and can do what the gentleman does. ↳ … They differ not because of endowment, nature, intelligence, and capabilities, but rather because of the measures by which they train and refine themselves. (HKCS 4/14/17 – 4/15/2)

First, note that this passage asserts clearly that the gentleman and the petty man have the same basic desires and interests. (And according to Xunzi, we are all born as uncultivated petty people,[21] so this is another way of saying that all people share these same basic desires and interests.) However, it also asserts that they have basically the same intelligence and capabilities, and in this respect it is explicitly committed to the basic similarity of people's epistemic faculties. Furthermore, on the basis of the latter claim, Xunzi remarks that the petty man "can do what the gentleman does," which would include—according to this passage—getting what he likes and avoiding what he dislikes. Insofar as the gentleman accomplishes these things because he follows the rituals (and thereby, the Way), the passage uses the similarity of the gentleman and petty man to assure people not only that they can follow the rituals as successfully as the gentleman, but moreover that they will derive the same benefits from doing so, benefits they already value. One final feature of the passage worth noting is its claim that you will discover the petty man to have the same basic intelligence and capabilities as the gentleman if you "thoroughly investigate" (*shú chá* 孰察) the matter. While this "thorough investigation" may not be exactly the same as what Zagzebski means by "conscientiousness," the claim is nonetheless broadly similar to her remark we saw in Section II of this chapter that "When I am conscientious I will come to believe that other normal, mature humans have … the same general powers and capacities that I have" (Zagzebski 2012: 55).

Concerning this last point, Zagzebski takes the trust in one's belief about the similarities between oneself and others to be founded in self-trust, especially when one conscientiously exercises one's epistemic faculties, and while Xunzi does not speak in exactly those terms, he is quite far from advocating an untrusting stance toward one's own epistemic faculties—his famously dim view of human nature focuses on its moral qualities and does not include pessimism about people's basic epistemic faculties per se.[22] Rather, Xunzi remarks, "For everyone, the ability to know comes from human nature, and what can be known are the patterns of things" (HKCS 21/106/18). He does not think that such knowledge comes automatically or effortlessly, though; Xunzi believes that the "heart" (*xīn* 心), which for him is the locus of psychological activity and possesses an evaluative capacity, must deliberately exercise that evaluative capacity:

> The heart has the power to judge its awareness. If it judges its awareness, then by following along with the ears it is possible to know (*zhi* 知) a sound, and by following along with the eyes one can know (*zhi* 知) a form. (HKCS 22/109/1–2)[23]

Here, Xunzi displays confidence in people's ability to know things, provided that the heart is put to work in the right way, and insofar as this remark is a lesson for his readers, the lesson is that they *can* trust in their own faculties when exercised appropriately
p. 386 (or in Zagzebski's terms, conscientiously). It is somewhat unclear how Xunzi regards the ↳ similarity between the petty man and gentleman that is revealed by "thorough investigation," namely, whether this similarity can be fully grasped only after one is immersed in the tradition of the sages, or whether it can be grasped simply from attentive and careful observation. If the latter, then even for those not yet committed to the rituals, Xunzi could appeal to the trustworthiness of their own carefully formed judgments as a starting point for building trust in the tradition. Given Xunzi's other remarks about people's epistemic capacities, I think the latter scenario is probably how he conceives the claim about the similarity between the gentleman and petty man, though due to lack of space I will not argue for that here.[24]

To this extent, Xunzi's work contains elements that can be used to construct a line of thought parallel to Zagzebski's: one can trust in one's own epistemic faculties when used carefully and reflectively, reflection leads one to realize the similarity between oneself and others, and hence it gives one reason to trust in what they do (and believe) as a way to accomplish the same things oneself. While these points might be mustered by Xunzi to get people to trust in the rituals, on Zagzebski's view they would not yet amount to a defense of deference to the epistemic authority of tradition. For Zagzebski, adopting beliefs on the basis of another's epistemic *authority* requires that one regard the other as *better* than oneself at getting the truth or beliefs that will survive conscientious self-reflection.[25] This point is important, because then some justifications for deferring to tradition that Xunzi offers will not generate genuine cases of deferring to epistemic authority. In particular, when one considers the metaphor of rituals as depth markers in a river, some possible reasons for following along with the markers rather than finding the safe path oneself are the time or risk that one would otherwise have to take. As applied to tradition, this latter reason is made quite explicit in the following passage:

> [A]ll people in the world … each have their own particular ideas. Nevertheless, there are some people to whom they accede in common. Those who discourse on flavor accede to Yi Ya [a famous cook]. Those who discourse on tones accede to Music Master Kuang [a famous musician]. Those who discourse on order accede to the three kings. Since the three kings have already fixed models and measures and established rituals and music and handed them down, then if there should be some who do not use them and instead change and create these themselves, how would this be any different from changing Yi Ya's blends of flavors and altering Music Master Kuang's musical scales? When the models of the three kings are absent, the empire will be lost without even a moment's delay, and a state will perish without even a moment's delay. (HKCS 27/137/16–18)

Here, the traditions of the "three kings" are presented (alongside YI Ya's flavor blends and Music Master Kuang's musical scales) as embodying a belief about what is best, and the passage urges one to adopt those beliefs.[26] However, the primary reason for doing so, as expressed in the last line, is not that one is less likely to arrive at the same beliefs on one's own but, rather, that *if* one came up with anything different, it would be worse, and disastrously so.

To see whether Xunzi defends deference to the epistemic *authority* of tradition, then, we must ask whether he presents tradition or its creators as better at capturing truths or beliefs that will survive reflective scrutiny than what people can do on their own. On this score, the metaphor of rituals as depth markers does not serve Xunzi very well, because probing the depths of a river is not especially difficult. Elsewhere, though, he deploys a different image:

> In every case, ritual and standards of righteousness are produced from the deliberate effort of the sage; they are not produced from people's nature. Thus, when the potter mixes up clay and makes vessels, the vessels are produced from the deliberate efforts of the craftsman; they are not produced from people's nature…. The sage accumulates reflections and thoughts and practices deliberate efforts and reasoned activities in order to produce ritual and standards of righteousness. (HKCS 23/114/8–11)

Here, the sage's production of ritual and the other parts of the tradition is likened to the *skilled* activity of a potter. Moreover, as the last sentence implies, that activity requires both practice and the accumulation of reflection. Insofar as ritual is seen as embodying beliefs about how to live that are formed in that way, then it would be plausible for those who come to follow the rituals to do so on the basis that (e.g., because of lack of practice and experience) they would not be able to figure this out as well on their own, and hence this scenario would fit Zagzebski's account of justifiably adopting beliefs (and practices) in deference to epistemic authority, on the model of JAB 1/2 or JAT 1/2.[27]

However, David Nivison has proposed a noteworthy alternative reading of Xunzi. He suggests taking Xunzi's analogy with pottery not in terms of a single potter making a pot but, rather, the gradual development of the art of pottery as a whole by multiple potters. Nivison writes,

> Xunzi's … way of speaking shows, I would argue, that he does not need to have an "individual genius" concept of "sagehood"; the development of institutions under the fashioning hand of the sages may well take ages. And if that is the case, then … respect for the sages is respect for the *accumulated* wisdom of the past.

> So a would-be innovator is blocked, even if all humans … are alike: because while I might claim that I can do something if sage S could, I cannot claim that I can duplicate a creative *process* that may have taken innumerable piecemeal decisions over centuries by many "sages." (Nivison 1996: 328–29)

Nivison labels the process of multiple sages developing the tradition over time a "creative" one, but we could also take it as an epistemic process (i.e., a "discovering"), and we could construe the sages as a temporally distributed community—an "extended self," as Zagzebski would put it—possessing epistemic states and powers. Insofar as individuals recognize those combined powers as more likely to get the truth (or beliefs that will survive conscientious scrutiny) than they are on their own, then in deferring to the
p. 388 judgments of that community (or greater self) as captured in the rituals, the case ↳ would fit Zagzebski's notion of justified deference to epistemic authority per JCEA 1/2.[28] Nivison states that Xunzi never clearly adopts this communal interpretation of the origins of the tradition, so he does not strongly insist on this reading of Xunzi. For present purposes, it suffices merely to note it as a view that would nicely explain the epistemic authority of tradition on Xunzi's view.[29]

At this point, let us take stock. I have suggested that on Xunzi's view, the decision to follow tradition by those not already immersed in it requires some trust, since the tradition's value is not fully accessible to them. Our question has been how Xunzi might motivate this trust, and what sort of trust it would be. One possibility—suggested by Dubs' remark quoted earlier—is that the trust is an unreasoning trust, perhaps a (rationally) blind trust. After comparing Xunzi with Zagzebski, it should be apparent that Xunzi can offer a different approach to trust. Zagzebski argues that given self-trust, it is rational to trust in others, and even more rational when that better enables one to achieve one's aims, so trusting in certain authorities and adopting beliefs and practices on that basis is justifiable, and hence religious faith need not be (rationally) blind faith. In Xunzi's case, he allows that people can trust their epistemic faculties when used carefully, and that when they investigate carefully, they will see that they do not especially differ from the sages who created the tradition and hence should believe that the ways devised by the sages to satisfy their needs and wants will also be effective for them. Moreover, Xunzi treats these practices as based on skill and experience (or on Nivison's reading, lifetimes of skill and experience) greater than what the uncultivated person possesses, which make it more likely that adopting these practices will help that person better satisfy their needs and wants than they could on their own. To that extent, Xunzi can offer reasons for trusting and following the authority of tradition, rather than demanding trust without reasoning.[30] Now, Xunzi himself never assembles the pieces of his view this way (probably in part because he does not face the challenges that motivate Zagzebski), so I am not claiming that this is precisely how he intends to persuade people to trust and follow the tradition, much less that this is his only argument for submitting to tradition—I have already noted in passing some other arguments to that end offered in the text. Rather, my point is that we could reconstruct an argument for Xunzi that parallels Zagzebski's without straying too far from his explicit views.[31]

If the preceding analysis is successful, then we have seen how Zagzebski can help us think more carefully about Xunzi. In the next and final section, I suggest that the intellectual benefits can flow in the other direction, too.

IV. Turning the Tables: Lessons from Xunzi

Since I have used Xunzi's metaphor of the markers in the river in discussing the reasons he can offer for trusting in the authority of
p. 389 tradition, let me now use this metaphor to ↳ articulate a potential challenge for his view and Zagzebski's. As we saw, part of what may justify one in following the markers rather than trying to figure out the safe path across oneself is that this method saves time and lessens risk. Or, one might simply be less likely to determine the safe path on one's own than those who planted the markers. Either way, however, the metaphor assumes that the *only* way to cross the river is wading through it, but of course that is not necessarily so. A bridge, for example, is arguably safer and more convenient, since one does not even get wet that way. Thus, if I want not merely to cross, but to cross in the safest, most convenient way, then even if I cannot rival those who planted the markers, it could also be reasonable for me to refrain from following the markers and seek other, better ways of crossing.

We can apply this insight to Zagzebski's case as follows. For her, following an epistemic authority is justified because the authority helps one do something that one already wishes to do, and do it better than one could on one's own. Now in the case of crossing the river, one can acknowledge that following the markers is better than one could do oneself, without yet thinking that following the

markers would be the *best* way across the river. So, too, can one acknowledge that believing what an authority believes (or about which an authority gives testimony) will get one beliefs that are more likely to be true or to survive conscientious self-reflection than one could get on one's own, without yet thinking that following the authority will get one beliefs that are *most* likely to be true or to survive conscientious self-reflection. Accordingly, just as one who seeks the best way across the river may have greater reason not to follow the markers and hold out for a better way, one who seeks beliefs that are most likely to be true or to survive conscientious self-reflection may have greater reason not to follow a given epistemic authority and instead await a better set of beliefs.

In terms of the metaphor with ritual, for which the depth markers stand, the problem is that the accumulated wisdom of tradition identifies for people at least an adequate way to live, and one better than they might be able to devise on their own, but the tradition might still not identify the best way to live, and so fail to justify deference on *that* score. Xunzi has an answer to this problem, because he insists that the rituals really *are* the best and only option (e.g., HKCS 30/143/20). The challenge for him is simply to make good on this claim.[32]

Since Zagzebski is not trying to defend a particular tradition, she does not face the exact same challenge. Nevertheless, the problem highlights an aspect of her view that one might not notice otherwise. In particular, one should see that neither Zagzebski's account of our natural desires, nor her criteria for assessing beliefs, nor her principles for adopting the beliefs of an epistemic authority are framed in maximizing terms. Rather, in all these cases she seems to work from a threshold or satisficing view.[33]

The obvious question, then, is whether one should adopt those operating assumptions about human beings, rationality, and justification.[34] Assessing that matter is too complicated to undertake here. For now, I hope merely to have shown that comparison with Xunzi helps highlight some of the commitments in (and potential challenges for) Zagzebski's position, and hence that ancient Chinese thought can be brought into productive conversation with contemporary Western epistemology.[35]

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Notes

1. See the introduction to Hutton (2014) for a partial defense of speaking of Xunzi in personified terms.
2. See Dubs (1927: 102–4, 1956: 215–16). See also Hansen (1992: 307–8). For criticism of such labeling as unhelpful, see Ivanhoe (2000: 245).
3. See Zagzebski (2012: 145–48) and Zagzebski (2010: 78).
4. Some parts of this section were previously published in Hutton (2018), though the present chapter was written before that essay.
5. Or more accurately, some *ru*; Xunzi thinks that not all the *ru* correctly grasped the way of the sages.
6. Apart from the rituals, certain "classics" are also regarded by Xunzi and other *ru* as key elements of the tradition. Addressing these other elements would greatly complicate the discussion here, so I omit treatment of them for now. I will sometimes use just the rituals as a stand-in for the rest of the tradition. This approach fits with Xunzi's own view that the rituals are more important—and thus in a sense better represent the tradition—than those other elements (e.g., HKCS 1/4/1–4).
7. All translations here are taken or adapted from Hutton (2014). References to the text follow the numbering system in Lau and Chen (1996) (abbreviated here as "HKCS").
8. For Xunzi, the "gentleman" (*jūnzǐ* 君子) designates someone who is an exemplar morally and intellectually. Sometimes he treats the gentleman as second best after the sage, but in many other cases the gentleman and sage are more or less equivalent for him, and that is how I will speak of them here.
9. E.g., HKCS 19/94/21. See also HKCS 19/98/1–2 and 30/143/20–21.
10. In other words, Xunzi is an antifoundationalist about moral knowledge. For more on this point, see Hutton (2015).
11. The extent to which Xunzi's appeal involves affect is less clear; I will discuss that issue further in the main text. Anyway,

Zagzebski does not absolutely require the affective component for a person to count as trusting.

12. I thank Linda Zagzebski for stressing to me this additional point of agreement (which I had not sufficiently appreciated originally) between her account and Xunzi's.

13. For example, promises (*nuò* 諾) are described by the *Xunzi* as capable of being *xin* ("trusted"/"trustworthy") or not-*xin* ("not trusted"/"untrustworthy") at HKCS 10/47/19 and 11/50/4. See also the *Han Feizi*, which contains a long passage (Lau and Chen 2000: 32/64/9–12) that demonstrates especially nicely how *xin* is used to describe the formation of beliefs in the absence of directly observable confirmation.

14. One might wonder whether historical knowledge could provide such confirmation instead. Strikingly, in this passage Xunzi makes no mention of history. Also, Xunzi acknowledges that details about the distant past are sketchy (HKCS 5/19/5–7), so it is not clear that he himself would rely on this alternative, or that, even if he did, it would solve the problem of having to believe something without personal confirmation (e.g., the accuracy of the historical record).

15. See, e.g., HKCS 21/107/23.

16. On this point, Zagzebski remarked in an unpublished response to this chapter that she does not believe that purely cognitive states like belief can motivate, and hence when an agent follows an authority out of trust despite having inclinations to the contrary, that trust must involve something more than simply belief, and in particular she construes it as a case ↳ where "one feeling counteracts another feeling." Thus, the extent to which Xunzi agrees or disagrees with Zagzebski on the need for an emotional component in trust in such cases depends in part on how one construes Xunzi's views of motivation, about which there is scholarly debate. I cannot pursue that topic here, but for an overview and statement of my own position, see Hutton (2016). The interpretation of Xunzi from David Wong as noted in that piece would effectively make Xunzi's view much closer to Zagzebski's than I grant in this chapter. My use of the word "largely" in the main text here reflects the nuances of my view in Hutton (2016) that I am eliding on this occasion.

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17. Both Ivanhoe (2000: 243) and Stalnaker (2006) differentiate Xunzi's view of human nature from Augustine's and provide good reasons for rejecting Dubs's translation of Xunzi's slogan as "human nature is evil."

18. See also Dubs (1927: 109, 173, 177, 196, 237–38, 246).

19. Compare Zagzebski's remarks about trusting in the authority of GPS systems at Zagzebski (2012: 119).

20. It should be noted that for Xunzi, the value of following the rituals and the Confucian tradition more broadly is not limited to just the practical goal of succeeding in following the Way. Though I can only sketch out the claim here, Xunzi thinks that one cannot consistently follow the Way if one does not know it (HKCS 21/103/18–19). Practicing and *reflecting* on the rituals are crucial for achieving this knowledge (HKCS 19/92/17–19). Moreover, I (and others) would argue that such ritual practice and reflection are crucial for developing the intellectual virtues that Xunzi considers necessary for one to consistently distinguish what is or is not part of the Way (Kjellberg 2016 offers one version of this argument). So for Xunzi, the epistemic achievements and abilities arising from following the rituals are also a substantial part of their value.

21. HKCS 4/15/14–15.

22. Indeed, none of the arguments in the *Xunzi* for the badness of people's nature rely on the idea that people's epistemic faculties are themselves defective. Some of them involve the idea that people are born ignorant of all moral standards, but such ignorance does not by itself entail (nor does Xunzi anywhere infer) that the people's epistemic faculties are therefore untrustworthy in themselves.

23. See also HKCS 21/102/9–10.

24. As a "partial payment" for the argument owed here, I note that Xunzi makes the remarks about the heart's ability to judge its awareness in the context of discussing how to sort things as similar or different, and the judgment about the basic similarity of the gentleman and petty man looks like the kind of claim that might be covered by the views espoused in that context.

25. See Zagzebski (2012: 134–35).

26. Xunzi does not say clearly who the "three kings" are. Some commentators suggest that they are the founding sage

kings of the three earliest dynasties: Yu, founder of the Xia; Tang, founder of the Shang; and King Wen and King Wu, founders of the Zhou. For more discussion and defense of that suggestion, see Hutton (2018).

27. JAB/JAT 2 is probably closer to Xunzi's view than JAB/JAT 1, given that he thinks the full justification of the tradition is only available from within it. As for JAB versus JAT, Xunzi thinks that the sages *taught* people the rituals, which fits Zagzebski's model of "telling" and hence would make JAT a suitable description. On the other hand, Xunzi thinks the sages exemplified the rituals in their own behavior, in which case JAB could also fit his view. Sorting out whether JAT
p. 392 or JAB best fits the text and how Xunzi would address the ↳ requirement of trust in the sincerity of the person offering the testimony would significantly extend the discussion here, so I must leave that exercise for another occasion.

28. As with the previous endnote, JCEA 2 might ultimately fit Xunzi better, but I will not pursue the matter here.

29. For a more substantive defense of Nivison's view, see Hutton (2018).

30. Another way of putting the point would be to say that Dubs errs by sliding from saying that Xunzi advises against trusting in one's nature to saying that Xunzi advises against trusting in one's reasoning.

31. Although the argument as reconstructed here justifies deferring to the tradition on the grounds that it will help people achieve their existing aims, I do not mean to claim that Xunzi considers this the ultimate justification for the tradition. Zagzebski remarks that it can be "reasonable for a subject to take the word of the authority as a reason to revise the first-order reasons for the sake of which she originally placed trust in the authority" (Zagzebski 2012: 145), and I think something similar applies in Xunzi's case. I lack space to discuss it here, but the kind of point I have in mind is articulated in Ivanhoe (2000: 238–40).

32. For one useful treatment of how Xunzi can try to address the problem of adjudicating between rival claimants to authority, see Harris (2017).

33. One place where Zagzebski does employ maximizing language is in her account of epistemic conscientiousness, which she describes as using one's faculties to the "best" of one's ability to obtain the truth (Zagzebski 2012: 48, quoted in Section II of this chapter). However, immediately after offering that description, she also says that conscientiousness comes in degrees, a claim that seems in tension (but is perhaps not completely irreconcilable) with the earlier maximizing language. Even if we use Zagzebski's maximizing description of conscientiousness, though, I think it does not substantially affect the point I am making in the main text, because that maximization applies to the *effort* directed toward obtaining the truth, rather than the (likelihood of) *truth* at which that effort is applied, and it is the latter item on which my point depends. In responding to the observations I present in the main text, Zagzebski has acknowledged that she had not thought to frame her views in maximizing/optimizing terms when writing her book—she found that alternative an intriguing possibility and suggested that her justifications could be modified in that direction, though she did not attempt to develop that revision in detail on that occasion. It strikes me that such a modification could help with some challenges but also create significant new problems, and so that sort of revision needs to be worked out carefully and subjected to a thorough assessment of its potential costs.

34. Xunzi does not claim there is a natural desire for truth, but he discusses other natural desires and treats some as maximizing (e.g., HKCS 11/51/24 – 11/52/1), so he might challenge Zagzebski on this point.

35. The ideas in this chapter were first presented at the second Rutgers Workshop on Chinese Philosophy in 2014. I thank the participants and audience, as well as my assigned commentator, Alvin Goldman, for their feedback then. Subsequently, I was invited to re-present a revised version of the paper at the fifth Rutgers Workshop on Chinese Philosophy in 2022, where I again received helpful feedback from the participants and audience, and from Linda Zagzebski herself. I am especially grateful to her and to the workshop organizers, Tao JIANG, Steve Angle, and Dean Zimmerman, for that opportunity. I also thank Justin Tiwald, P. J. Ivanhoe, and an anonymous reviewer for their
p. 393 comments on this piece. Due ↳ to limits of space, I have unfortunately not been able to address all the feedback I have received.

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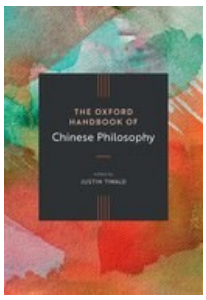

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CHAPTER

20 Laozi and zhu Xi on Knowledge and Virtue

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Abstract

This chapter compares Laozi and ZHU Xi on knowledge of the *dao* and virtue. Both agree that one who knows the *dao* accords with nature. They disagree about using the mind in the investigation of things and *wuwei*, naming and making distinctions, self-cultivation, and adhering to ritual proprieties. Comparing their views will reveal challenges to each philosopher's views and illuminate the strengths and weaknesses in each. A nuanced comparison between these authors' views of *dao* and its relation to virtue and knowledge will clarify their philosophies more than a focus on only one of them because the mutual challenges that each can offer the other enable a deeper look into the resources they have for responding to questions that might not have arisen otherwise.

Keywords: Dao, virtue, knowledge, mind, wuwei, naming, cultivation
Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy
Series: Oxford Handbooks
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I. Introduction

Both the Daoist, Laozi, and the neo-Confucian, ZHU Xi, concern themselves with virtue and knowledge. Both offer a first principle or *dao* that is the ground of everything, including virtue and knowledge. According with nature is the way of the *dao* for both authors. Despite these similarities, their differences are widespread. For example, they differ in their views regarding the significance of purposive action, the investigation of things, naming and making distinctions, self-cultivation, and adhering to ritual proprieties, just to name a few. Since Daoism was one of Zhu's influences, similarities between his philosophy and Daoism are not unexpected.[1] Setting aside the specific Daoist doctrines that Zhu had assimilated or rejected, I want to examine the similarities and differences in Laozi's and Zhu's views regarding knowledge of their respective first principles and how knowledge is related to virtue for each. I end with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of their views on this topic. I believe that a nuanced comparison between these authors' views of *dao* and its relation to virtue and knowledge that's aimed at showing their strengths and weaknesses would illuminate their philosophies more than a focus on only one of them. This is because of the mutual challenges that each can offer to the other so that we can look deeper into the resources they have for responding to questions that might not have arisen otherwise.

II. Dao

Laozi's *dao* is the source of everything in the universe. He tells us that the *dao* is "all pervasive, it can be found on the left and on the
p. 395 right" (34).[2] Continuing, Laozi says ↳ that the *dao* is "that upon which the ten thousand things (*wànwù* 萬物) rely for their existence (*shēng* 生, also "life" or "growth"), and it doesn't abandon any of them" (34). Laozi remarks on the characteristics with which the *dao* performs its activity by saying, "Completing its work, it doesn't have a name, clothing and nourishing the ten thousand things, it doesn't act as a lord. Always without desire, it can be named in the smallest things" (34). Not only is Laozi's *dao* the source of everything; it seems to be impartial, noncovetous in general, and also in respect to power (since it doesn't act as a lord over its productions), and gaining recognition (since it doesn't have a name). Laozi says, "The *dao* is always nameless" (*dào cháng wú míng* 道常無名, 32).

Similarly, Zhu speaks of a Heaven-endowed nature or principle that is in all things, making them what they are, which is the form or essence of *dao*. He says, "The essence of *dao* is an all-encompassing wholeness which contains everything, and which is contained in everything."[3] That everything contains the principle of *dao* is clear when Zhu says, "principle is not something generated forcibly from outside; rather, the principle of *dao* is the principle which is innate in ourselves."[4] The pervasiveness of *dao* for Zhu is evident when he says, "*Dao* exists in the world in all places and at all times, and that's it."[5] Again, he says, "Like flying hawks and leaping fish, the substance of *dao* is everywhere. You need not forget it or help it, for the universal principle of *dao* just flows along. This is simply the way it is."[6] Thus, Zhu's *dao* is like Laozi's in that it is the all-pervasive source of everything.

More specifically, Zhu maintains that the essence of *dao* in everything is one principle that is universal and the same even though its manifestations are many.[7] He says, "The universal principle of *dao* is the same, but its manifestations are different. Therefore, there is a principle for ruler–subject relationships as well as for father-son relationships."[8] Put otherwise, the particular principles that govern particular relationships and things are different; for example, how sons are to relate to fathers are different from how subjects are to relate to rulers, even though they are caused by the same principle of *dao*, which effect is that things are what they are because of the principle or pattern of order (*lǐ* 理). *Dao* then, for Zhu, is *li* (理) in the sense that *dao* is the principle of order that not only causes all things to be by existing in them but also governs them by organizing them into their respective natures. For instance, Zhu calls attention to CHENG Yi's remark that "humanity (*rén* 仁, also 'benevolence' or 'humaneness') is the correct principle of the world. When the correct principle is lost, there will be no order and consequently no harmony." For Zhu, this description of humanity is too general. He offers the following instead: "humanity is the perfect virtue of the original mind and consequently there is the principle of nature (*tiān lǐ* 天理) in it. If the principle of nature is absent, human desires will run wild. How can there be any order or any resultant harmony?"[9] Zhu's comment means that the principle of nature is ultimately responsible for any order and harmony in the human mind or the world.

Contrasting the particular principles in things with the universal principle of *dao*, Zhu says,

> p. 396 *Dao* means a roadway. Roughly speaking, it is that road which all men travel on. Each principle has a linear system and circumscribed limits … *Dao* is the Way. It has no form, though when we travel on it we can see it in affairs.[10]

The universal principle of *dao* has no form in the sense that it doesn't have a particular order, nor is it a particular path even though its essence of order in general is present in each particular principle, making each thing what it is. Zhu tells us that the principles for particular things and relationships exist before these concrete particulars, and they originate from the same source. He says,

> Before the existence of things and affairs, their principles are already present. All our handlings of affairs and responses to things, however momentary, are manifestations of this principle. A track is a path on which one should travel. Such things as deep love on the part of the father and filial piety on the part of the son are but one track. They all come from one source.[11]

In short, *dao* is the one universal principle in everything, which gives rise to the particular principles that manifest the one order of everything, or the path on which all things travel.

Even though Laozi's *dao* is not explicitly said to inhere in everything, and thus may seem different from Zhu's *dao*, which does inhere in all things, a closer examination reveals some similarities between them. To begin, consider Zhu's view that the universal principle of *dao* has no form but is the single source of all particular principles. This is comparable to Laozi's *dao*, which is also formless as it is indistinct (25), vague (21), invisible, and inaudible (35)[12] and hence is like unhewn wood that is nameless (32) because it isn't anything in particular that can be assigned a fixed name. Moreover, Laozi's *dao* also seems to be universal and inhere in everything when he says, "The *dao* is what is mysterious or obscure (*ào* 奧) in the ten thousand things (*wanwu*). Good people treasure it, bad people are protected by it" (62). If the *dao* is equally shared by the good and the bad, it is the mystery that unites the ten thousand things and thus is common to everything. Laozi even identifies existence with *dao* when he compares the kingly to the heavenly and adds, "To be heavenly is to be (*nǎi* 乃) the *dao*. To be (*nai* 乃) the *dao* is to be long-lasting (*jǐu* 久)" (16, see also 7). As such, Laozi's *dao*, like Zhu's, is not only the one source of all things but is also the cause of their persistence. To be at all, for both authors, is to share the same *dao*.

III. Particular Principles and First Principles

Unlike Zhu, Laozi doesn't talk about particular principles in things that are responsible for their particular orders, which are
p. 397 contrasted with the formlessness and vagueness ↳ of the universal *dao*. But Laozi also has a counterpart to such particular principles if we consider how he acknowledges different conditions for different things (64). Speaking of the highest good (*shàng shàn* 上善), Laozi likens it to water, which benefits the ten thousand things without contending with them. He adds that water is close to the *dao*, as it resides in places that everyone loathes, implying that there's goodness in everything (8). Specifying how this goodness varies for particular things, Laozi says,

> In residence, the good is its place,
>
> In the heart/mind, the good is the abyss,
>
> In relations, the good is humaneness (*rén* 仁),
>
> In speech, the good is in truthfulness (*xìn* 信),
>
> In government, the good is in ruling (*zhì* 治),
>
> In activities (*shì* 事), the good is in ability,
>
> In movement (*dòng* 動), the good is in timing (*shí* 時).

Since what is good varies with different things, practices, and activities for Laozi, and he says that we should support the ten thousand things in their natural conditions, he is like Zhu in thinking that particular things have their particular orders.

Zhu's *dao* is the one principle of nature that manifests itself differently in different things ordered by their respective particular principles. Particular principles that inhere in particular things are responsible for their natures. He says,

> Nature is like a ray of sunshine: that which people and things receive are different, just like the ray of sunlight shining through an opening can be either large or small. Humans and things are fixed by their form and matter, and once they are, it is difficult to change them. It is like the cricket and the ant being so small that they only know the difference between superior and inferior and that's all.[13]

Like Zhu's view that the principle of nature can be received in varying degrees by concrete things, which account for their differences from each other, Laozi too advocates that things with different natures have varying degrees of proximity to the *dao*. It seems that everything eventually abides by the law of the *dao* except that their reception of this law is mediated through other entities that are closer to the *dao*. For instance, there's a progressive hierarchy that governs the order from human beings to Earth, heaven and ultimately, to the *dao* for him. Laozi says,

> There are four great things: the *dao*, heaven (*tiān* 天), earth (*dì* 地), and human beings (*rén* 人). And how people live is one: The law/way (*fǎ* 法) of the people is the earth; the law/way of the earth is the heaven; the law/way of the heaven is the *dao*; and the law/way of the *dao* is the natural (*dào fǎ zìrán* 道法自然). (25)

Since the natural (*zìrán* 自然) is the norm of the *dao*, which is ultimately the norm of human beings, Earth, and Heaven because of
p. 398 their hierarchical order, the natural is also the norm of these subordinates to the *dao*, that is, Heaven, Earth and human beings. ↳ Like Zhu's comparison of nature to the ray of sunlight that reaches different things in different degrees, Laozi's *dao* that dictates the natural also reaches different things like human beings, the Earth, and Heaven, in different degrees. Let's consider how the natural (*ziran*) is the nature of everything for Laozi, just as Zhu's principle of nature governs the nature of everything.

IV. Zhu's Principle of Nature (*Tianli*) and Laozi's Natural (*Ziran*)

For Laozi, nothing captures the natural (*ziran*) or the *dao* better than unhewn wood. Like the nameless *dao*, which doesn't exhibit any particular order and yet orders the whole world, unhewn wood isn't any particular thing and yet is the basis for infinite things. The problem with naming for Laozi is that any name that is tendered is not the constant (*cháng* 常) name. For instance, if the unhewn wood were carved into a boat and we call it a boat, both the boat and its name are temporary. The wood that is now a boat is not just limited to being a boat but could have been and can still be numerous other things. By calling it a boat, we're limiting the wood to a particular thing and thus limiting its nature. It is natural for unhewn wood to be capable of being a boat, a door, a window, and numerous other things. By calling it a boat, we limit it and our relation to it and, consequently, limit the *dao*, whose nature is always to produce (*sheng* 生) and nurture (*zhǎng* 長) without possessing (*bù yǒu* 不有) (10). As Laozi says, "The *dao* is like an empty vessel; no use could ever fill it up. Vast and deep! It seems to be the ancestor of the myriad creatures" (Ivanhoe 2002, Chapter 4).[14] Like the infinite possibilities of the *dao*, unhewn wood too can be the source of many things. Unhewn wood is closer to the *dao* than wood that has been carved into something, say, a bowl. Again, Laozi says, "The *dao* is hidden with no name. Only the *dao* is good at giving and completing" (41). Naming prohibits the *dao* from producing the ten thousand things (*wanwu*) and completing them. Consider how the unhewn wood of a living tree can never complete its natural course of existence when it is cut down and carved into wooden objects. As Laozi puts it, "When unhewn wood is carved up, then there are names. Now that there are names, know enough to stop!" (Ivanhoe 2002, Chapter 32). Laozi wants us to stop carving up unhewn wood since the carved objects are further from the *dao* than unhewn wood. Compared with unhewn wood, carved objects are more limited in their possibilities, but ultimately, they are most limited by our view of them, and what we call them, which in turn affects our relationship to them. The natural condition of unhewn wood, on the contrary, is to be a bountiful source of multiple things.

Naming also goes hand in glove with distinguishing things from their opposites for Laozi, which in turn leads to our preference for one of the opposites to the other in our behavior.[15] Instead of distinguishing opposites and preferring one to the other, Laozi thinks
p. 399 that it is natural for opposites to interact and mutually depend on each other. If ↳ naming leads us to distinctions and discriminations, Laozi thinks that it's also an act that misleads us. That opposites are mutually dependent on each other for Laozi is evident when he says,

> Being (*yǒu* 有) and nonbeing (*wú* 無) give rise to each other, the difficult and easy complete each other, the long and the short shape each other, the sound and the voice harmonize each other, beginning and end follow each other. Thus the sage manages affairs according to effortless action (*wúwéi* 無為) and teaches through his behavior (*xíng* 行) without speech (*bù yán* 不言). (2)

Again, "the good person is teacher of the bad; the bad person is material for the good," (27) and "What you intend to shrink, you first must stretch. What you intend to weaken, you must first strengthen" (36). Because of the interdependence of opposites, nonaction/effortless action (*wuwei*) and not discriminating against any of the ten thousand things are the practices in which sages engage, for these are modeled on the activities of the *dao* itself for Laozi. Instead of distinguishing the good person from the bad and trying to promote the former in our actions, so characteristic of conventional behavior, Laozi emphasizes and supports the interdependence between good and bad people through nonaction.

Nonaction (*wuwei*) is not the same as not acting at all.[16] Rather, it means not acting for the sake of some preconceived purpose. For action, *wei*, following Chad Hansen, simply means "for the sake of."[17] Thus, when one acts to promote good people and discriminate against bad people, one violates the natural interdependence between these opposites for Laozi. Instead of acting to exclude one opposite and include the other extreme, Laozi thinks that we should harmonize opposites by adhering to the natural (*ziran*) conditions of things. He says that one should "assist all things (*wanwu*) in their being natural (*ziran*) and not dare to act for the sake of some preconceived purpose (*wéi* 為)" (64). Laozi's view is that everything has its natural condition that cannot be satisfied by pursuing one extreme while excluding the other. For example, he tells us that sages order people by filling their bellies (3, 12). We can infer from this that peoples' bellies are constantly becoming empty, as being empty is the natural opposite of being full. For Laozi, sages can't fill peoples' bellies by encouraging them to pursue the conventional pleasures, for these only limit what people value to one set of extremes while excluding the opposites. Such one-sided pursuits ruin our senses and make us mad according to Laozi. He says,

> The five colors blind our eyes.
>
> The five notes deafen our ears.
>
> The five flavors deaden our palates.
>
> The chase and the hunt madden our hearts.
>
> Precious goods impede our activities.
>
> This is why sages are for the belly and not for the eye;
>
> And so they cast off the one and take up the other. (Ivanhoe 2002, Chapter 12)

p. 400 For Laozi, it is natural for people to get hungry and be in need of nourishment. What's unnatural is to desire only the five flavors, just as it is merely conventional to pursue the five colors and five notes. Such limits for him destroy our five senses and lead to social disorder as people compete to get a set of extremes while neglecting the opposite extremes, when both are equally useful for nourishment. Contrary to such limited pursuits, Laozi says, "This is why sages cast off whatever is extreme, extravagant, or excessive" (Ivanhoe 2002, Chapter 29). For Laozi, when rulers can preserve the natural, the ten thousand things (*wanwu*) would be in order, Heaven and Earth would unite, and people would order themselves without legislations (32). In short, adhering to the natural way of the *dao*, there will be cosmic harmony and unity. For Laozi, such sagely behaviors and their effects are consistent with his view that ultimately, the way of *dao*, which is the natural, governs everything in the world by harmonizing opposites and not discriminating against anything.

Zhu would concur with Laozi about the interdependence of opposites. Commenting on CHENG Hao's view that the principle of Heaven and Earth dictates that "nothing exists in isolation but everything necessarily has its opposite," Zhu agrees that everything has its opposite because of principle.[18] Zhu says,

> As there is the high, there is the low, and as there is the large, there is the small. This is true because of principle. In the things produced by Heaven, there cannot be *yīn* (陰) alone; there must also be *yáng* (陽). And there cannot be *yang* alone; there must also be *yin*. There must be opposition. In this opposition it is not principle that opposes, but according to principle there should be opposition like this.[19]

It is important to note that for both Zhu and Laozi, even though their respective first principles are the causes of things having opposites that are harmonious and interdependent in that they flow into each other, the first principles themselves preexist everything else and are not changeable. So Laozi says of his *dao* that it "is undifferentiated (*hún* 混) yet complete (*chéng* 成), that it exists before heaven and earth. It is alone, independent and unchanging" (25). Similarly, we've seen that Zhu's *dao* is formless and exists before things and affairs.[20] Furthermore, Zhu says, "Throughout the universe there is only a fixed and unchanging principle. This we must understand. Do not pretend for an instant that you can manipulate it, and do not assume for a moment that you can change it," showing that his principle is like Laozi's *dao* in being unchangeable.[21]

V. “Nonbeing” for Laozi and Zhu

Following the fact that *dao* is unchangeable for Laozi, even though he tells us that being (*yǒu* 有) and nonbeing *(wú* 無) give rise to each other, it doesn’t mean that there is a nothing that generated the *dao*. Since *dao* is the unchanging first principle for Laozi, it isn’t
p. 401 in turn produced by an opposite, unlike how things that are in the world arise ↳ from nonbeing. At best, Laozi compares the way that the *dao* works to nonbeing. For example, he compares the force of *dao* to an empty vessel that cannot be filled or exhausted in being used (4), and how each thing like a wheel, a clay vessel, or a room relies on what is not there for its use (11). Because the *dao* is not anything in particular, or an absolute nothing, nor does it rely on a nothing for its own existence, it isn’t limited to anything or a purpose, nor does it discriminate against anything. Thus, Laozi’s *dao* is a source of utility. Analogously, because unhewn wood isn’t any particular thing, it can be the material for multiple things.

Unlike the singularity and vagueness of Laozi’s *dao*, Zhu’s *dao* as the one principle of nature is distinguished into the Non-Ultimate (*wújí* 無極) and the Great Ultimate (*tàijí* 太極). While *taiji* is active, *wuji* is without activity for Zhu. But *wuji* isn’t the same as nonexistence. Rather, it is the state of tranquility in which only principles exist without any activity so that there is “neither sound nor smell” and thus nothing physical.[22] Zhu says,

> While the state before activity begins cannot be spoken of as the Great Ultimate [*taiji*], nevertheless the principles of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are already inherent in it…. In the initial stage the four are not manifested, but their principles are already there.[23]

More elaborately, *wuji* is not absolute nothing that then becomes being due to activity. Rather, principles already exist in *wuji*, and they become visible or achieve physical form when activity makes them visible.[24] When the *dao* as *wuji* is invisible, it is “indefinite, boundless, and different in infinite variety, where concreteness is not to be seen.”[25] Despite *wuji’s* indefiniteness and boundlessness, it isn’t nothing. This is clear when Zhu explains Zhoudunyi’s remark, “the Ultimate of Nonbeing [*wuji*] and also the Great Ultimate [*taiji*],” saying, “It does not mean that outside of the Great Ultimate there is an Ultimate of Nonbeing.”[26] *Wuji* and *taiji* represent the same principles in different states; the former is invisible, tranquil and unmoved, while the latter is visible, active, and moved.

VI. Zhu’s *Taiji*, *Wuji*, and Laozi’s *Dao*

In contrast to the total inactivity or tranquility and nonphysical nature of *wuji*, *taiji* relies on *qì* 氣 (material energy that is common to mind and matter) for its activity.[27] Zhu says, “The Great Ultimate [*taiji*] exists only in the *yin* and *yang*, and cannot be separated from them.”[28] He explains the relation between *taiji* and the yin and yang qi in the process of generation as follows:

> Principle attaches itself to *yin* and *yang* as a man sits astride a horse. As soon as *yin* and *yang* produce the Five Agents
> p. 402 (*wǔxíng*五行), they are … fixed by physical nature ↳ and are … differentiated into individual things each with its nature. But the Great Ultimate is in all of them.”[29]

If principles can be invisible or visible, they must exist in qi to be visible and active. For Zhu, the mind (*xīn* 心) is the kind of qi in which principles must inhere in order for them to be accessed completely. More specifically, although principles exist in all things for Zhu, they manifest themselves in different degrees in different things. Only human beings have the nature (mind), that when cultivated, will allow the full manifestation of principles. Zhu says, “The mind embraces all principles and all principles are complete in this single entity, the mind.”[30] He adds, “There must be mind before nature can be gotten hold of and put into operation.”[31]

If Zhu’s *taiji* requires yin and yang qi to exist and be active, it differs from Laozi’s *dao*, which preexists and creates qi. Even if qi doesn’t preexist Zhu’s *taiji*, but coexists with it, Zhu’s qi is still different from Laozi’s, which is produced by the *dao*. Laozi says,

> *Dao* produces (*sheng*) one, one produces two, two produces three,
>
> Three produces the ten thousand things (*wanwu*).

> *Wanwu* are supported by *yin* and embraced by *yang*,
>
> Dynamic *qi* (*chōng qì* 沖氣) makes them harmonious (*hé*和). (42)

Interpreting the "two" in this passage as yin and yang, and the "three" as yin and yang working together as dynamic qi that balances or harmonizes yin and yang qi, all qi issues from the one that is produced by *dao* for Laozi. Not only is the "one" the source of everything for him; it's also the norm of perfection for everything. As Laozi puts it,

> Heaven (*tian*) attains the one and is thereby pure;
>
> Earth attains the one and is thereby peaceful;
>
> Spirit (*shén* 神) attains the one and is thereby intelligent;
>
> Valley attains the one and is thereby full;
>
> *Wanwu* attain the one and are thereby alive;
>
> Princes and kings attain the one and thereby act as (*wei*) the model under heaven. (39)

Laozi's *dao*, then, is the cause of oneness, which in turn causes qi that harmonizes everything in the universe into their respective unities, thus enabling them to be complete and flourish. Put otherwise, Laozi's *dao* is the ultimate source of the natural condition (*ziran*) of everything because it produces the oneness that harmonizes everything into the unity that is natural for each thing.

Since Zhu's *taiji* is different from Laozi's *dao* because of its reliance on qi, how about his *wuji*? *Wuji* seems like Laozi's *dao*, as both of them are invisible, indefinite, and boundless. But they aren't alike since *wuji* is totally inactive while Laozi's *dao* is active in producing all things. Another difference is that whereas Laozi's *dao* works like a nothing or emptiness, Zhu's *wuji* is not a nothing
p. 403 nor does it work like a nothing. Rather, despite *wuji's* tranquility, it already contains the principles of all things, for example, the ↳ principles of pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, different relationships, and more generally, the one principle of nature (*tian li*), which is manifested differently in the different particular principles. However, Zhu's one principle of nature is like Laozi's *dao* in that it too is responsible for the unity or order/harmony of each thing's nature.

VII. Human Mind and Knowledge

The fact that Zhu insists on the human mind as the kind of qi in which principles must inhere in order for them to be accessed completely distinguishes his first principle from that of Laozi, who doesn't grant any privilege to the human mind for accessing the *dao*. Even though one and the same *tian li* exists completely in all things for Zhu, because he insists that only the human mind/nature can access it completely and put it into practice,[32] human beings are superior to things and animals in their ability to know the *taiji* and hence the *dao* for him. He says, "Our heaven-endowed nature is everywhere. But when we look for it we must start with ourselves. This is why we say that one's nature is the form and essence of *dao*."[33] Again, Zhu says,

> Nature is what is not yet moved. Feelings are what is already moved. The mind contains both what is already moved and what is not yet moved. What is not yet moved in the mind is nature, and what is already moved is feelings, and what we call the mind governs nature and feelings."[34]

Since human nature is the essence of *dao* and mind is this nature (prior to activity and hence prior to qi), Zhu holds that our ability to know nature depends on our ability to master qi and control our feelings. More specifically, according to Zhu, human beings are endowed with the moral principles of humaneness (*ren*), appropriateness (*yì* 義), propriety (*lǐ* 禮), and wisdom (*zhì* 智).[35] Just as it is the mind of Heaven and Earth to produce things without ceasing, man's mind is to use these four virtues of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* to "love people gently and to benefit things."[36] Since the *dao* is indefinite, boundless, and invisible, Zhu believes that we can only access it by looking into our nature, which contains these four concrete moral principles.[37] Since the same principle of nature (*tian li*) exists in all things, Zhu thinks that we can know the *dao* (principle of nature) by investigating the principles of things. He says,

"there is nothing for the student to do except to examine all principles with his mind,"[38] and "investigating the phenomena of things is the beginning of knowledge."[39] Ultimately, for Zhu, "without the mind there is no way to perceive nature. Discard nature and there is no way to perceive the mind."[40]

Whereas Zhu would emphasize the necessity of using the mind to investigate the principles of things in order to know the *dao* or principle of nature, Laozi would think that Zhu's requirements of using the mind and investigation lead to conventional knowledge
p. 404 rather than genuine knowledge. Zhu asserts, "Exhaustive investigation of principles … ↳ and self-cultivation" (by studying books) "are like two wheels of a cart, or the two wings of a bird."[41] Laozi, on the contrary, would deny that *dao* can be achieved by an exhaustive investigation of things because the constant *dao* for him is forever hidden and nameless (41), so that those who know don't talk about it (56). More elaborately, Laozi advocates abandoning (conventional) wisdom to benefit the people (19), for he thinks that when wisdom and knowledge arise, so does great hypocrisy (18). In contrast to the sort of knowledge that can be gained through conventional practices that exert the mind and study, Laozi thinks that using the mind to causally act upon qi (*xīn shǐ qì* 心使氣) is called force (*qiáng* 強) (55), which for him doesn't abide by the law of the *dao*, that is, what's natural (*ziran*). Instead of the sort of knowledge that uses the mind to guide life, Laozi believes that genuine knowledge is the sort that returns everything to its root, which is called stillness (*jìng* 靜), which in turn is equivalent to everything's returning to their lives (*mìng* 命) (16). Ultimately, returning to one's life is called constancy (*cháng* 常) for Laozi, and knowledge of this constancy is what he calls enlightenment (*míng* 明). Enlightenment is the sort of knowledge that leads one to be accommodating (*róng* 容) and work for the common good (*gōng* 公), which is the *dao* that's embodied by the king and Heaven (16). Being accommodating and working for the common good, as we've seen earlier for Laozi, is knowledge of how to harmonize opposites and not discriminate against anything. In short, it is knowledge of what's natural (*ziran*) or the law of the *dao*, so that we can support things in their natural conditions (64) instead of acting for a preconceived purpose. Laozi would regard Zhu's insistence on investigating the principles of everything with his mind so that he can act to realize the four virtues of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* as acting for preconceived purposes. Actions that are aimed at achieving conventional knowledge and virtues as prescribed by Zhu would discriminate against certain things instead of supporting everything indiscriminately, according to Laozi. Thus, Zhu's recommendation of using the mind to know the *dao* is not the Way of the *ziran* for Laozi.

Another way of looking at the disagreement between Laozi and Zhu is to focus on how Laozi's *dao* works by being like a nothing or emptiness while both Zhu's *taiji* and *wuji* work by containing the principles of all things. Accordingly, Laozi is skeptical about naming and making distinctions in things whereas Zhu is for distinguishing different things and naming them. Consider Zhu's remark:

> The beginning of the pursuit of knowledge and practical action lies precisely in learning, inquiry, thinking, discrimination, and effort in action. Given this, we can actually change and transform our physical constitution and enter into *dao*.[42]

Laozi would disagree that such active pursuit of knowledge by learning, inquiry, thinking, and discrimination is the way to achieve the *dao*. He would say that discriminations through thinking, learning, and inquiry limit things and the way that we relate to them, just as how carving up unhewn wood limits the natural condition of the wood and how we relate to it.

p. 405 Instead of Zhu's view that we must transform our physical constitution to be with the *dao*, Laozi would say that we're naturally already in the *dao*. This is supported by Laozi's claim that it is by being still (*jing*) rather than exerting effort in action that we return to the *dao*. Rather than the sort of knowledge that Zhu thinks is derived from the mind's investigations into the principles of things to know the reason why they are what they are, and why they should be a certain way to guide our actions, Laozi relies on the body's knowledge.[43] He says, "if someone can value everything under heaven as he values his own body, then he can be entrusted with everything under heaven. If he can love everything under heaven as he loves his own body, then he can support everything under heaven" (13). For Laozi, one does not require learning or investigation into the principles of things to value and love one's body. Tending to one's body seems to be as simple as filling one's belly when it gets empty, and one doesn't need to study or investigate anything to know that one's belly is empty. In short, tending to one's body comes quite naturally (*ziran*) to everyone for Laozi; it doesn't require one's mind to pursue knowledge or any effort in action. What Laozi seems to be saying in this passage then, is that if we can extend this natural way of dealing with our bodies to everything in the world, that is, if we can apply the harmony of opposites in our bodies to the opposites in the world, then we can do what's best for everything in the world. This is the natural

(*ziran*) harmony of opposites in the law of the *dao* that is also the law of everything else. If we know how *ziran* works for our body, we also know how it works for the rest of the world. That the body instead of the mind is Laozi's model is clear when he remarks that sages order people by filling their bellies (3) without (conventional) knowledge (10), or acting for some preconceived purpose (*wuwei*) (2). His repeated appeals to being like children or infants (10, 28, 55) as the norm of behavior stress the natural qualities that they exemplify: the harmony between opposites like the weak and the firm in their bodies (55), how they don't use their minds to force qi (55) because they are supple and weak (10), and how they don't possess knowledge or act for some preconceived purpose (28, 10). These characteristics of infants are completely antithetical to Zhu's ideal of using the mind to achieve knowledge.

VIII. Cultivation and Virtue

Having examined Zhu's view of the necessity of an exhaustive investigation of principles as one of the two wheels of a cart, or one of the two wings of a bird, to know the *dao*, let us consider his other requirement, namely, self-cultivation, and compare it with Laozi's view. Because Zhu believes that the human mind, like everything else in the world, is endowed with the principle of nature, more specifically, the concrete moral principles of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*, he believes that "the human mind is basically good."[44] He says, "Our mind is originally bright, but only becomes dim by profit and desire. We need to make the spot of radiant light restore its
p. 406 brightness."[45] Also likening human nature to water, ↳ Zhu asserts, "Human nature is analogous to water: originally it is pure."[46] Continuing the analogy with water, Zhu says,

> The mind is like water: nature is like the stillness of water, feelings are the flow of water. Desire is turbulent waves, but waves which can be both good and bad. A good desire is like the kind when I desire humanity… a bad desire will destroy the universal principle, just as when pent-up water (is suddenly released) there is nothing it does not destroy.[47]

To restore the original brightness or purity of our mind, a two-fold cultivation is required for Zhu. On the one hand, since the substance of mind, which is pure, is already innate in us, we just need to express reverential attention (*jìng* 敬) to preserve this substance.[48] On the other hand, since the same principle of nature/substance in our minds is in everything else in the world, we need to investigate the principles of things to understand this substance and extend its function by responding correctly to things in our actions.[49] Zhu says,

> If you wish to respond to things you should first make a thorough investigation of the principles. And if you wish to thoroughly investigate the principles, then you must cultivate the fundamentals of the mind. Only by keeping it tranquil and clear will you be able to examine the most minute points and analyze the most disordered material without the least error.[50]

By keeping the mind tranquil and clear, Zhu doesn't mean the kind of quietude (*jìng* 靜) of not acting for a preconceived purpose that Laozi recommends. Acknowledging that there isn't anything in the world, no matter how minute, that is devoid of the principle of *dao*, and hence nothing that doesn't include both movement and rest, Zhu recommends that one "simply use this principle in undertaking things for we cannot exclusively seek it from a position of quietude."[51]

To summarize, the two-fold cultivation is: (i) self-cultivation to preserve the moral principles the mind possesses so that we can understand the principle of nature (*tian li*) that makes clear what is right and wrong, as well as good and evil by examining our mind;[52] (ii) The investigation of the principles in things that is in turn required for us to respond to them.[53] In short, understanding the original goodness of the human mind in (i) enables us to use it as a standard in our response to things in (ii).[54] As Zhu puts it, "taking the great and proper principle of *dao* under heaven and applying it to affairs is 'impartiality' (*gōng* 公). Acting on our own personal desires is 'selfishness' (*sī* 私)."[55]

Zhu's talk of the original brightness or purity of the mind seems akin to Laozi's regard for the qualities of the infant. Zhu's injunction to apply the principle of *dao* to affairs to achieve impartiality or the common good (*gong*) as opposed to acting from one's selfish desires also seems like Laozi's talk about enlightenment that comes with knowledge of constancy, which leads one to be accommodating and hence work for the common good. Upon closer examination, neither of these comparisons is what it seems.
p. 407 While ↳ the original goodness or purity of the mind for Zhu comes from the principle of nature it contains, the purity of the infant

for Laozi stems from the emptiness of its mind. What's valued in the infant is its lack of knowledge. The suppleness of the infant's body exemplifies the constant harmony between its weakness and firmness. Likewise, the two authors differ in their views about the common good. Whereas Zhu insists on using our minds to reflect and apply the one principle of nature to everything that exists, Laozi advocates not using the mind and nonaction (*wuwei*) so that one isn't trying to achieve any preconceived purpose.

Whereas Zhu associates knowledge of the *dao* as the principle of nature with one's ability to act virtuously, by according to the concrete principles of virtue (*ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*), Laozi is skeptical of any talk of virtue and cultivation of *li*. Laozi believes that there'll be talk of virtues only when they are lost. He asserts, "it is after the way is lost that virtue arises, after humaneness is lost that appropriateness (*yi*) arises, and after appropriateness is lost that ritual proprieties (*li*) arise."[56] On the contrary, the highest virtue (*shàng dé* 上德), for Laozi, is more like the *dao*. Explaining why the *dao* is honored and virtue (*de*) esteemed naturally (*ziran*) by the ten thousand things without being decreed (*mìng* 命), Laozi says,

> *Dao* produces them, whilst virtue raises and nourishes them, completes and matures them, rears and protects them. Producing without possessing, acting for the sake of (*wèi* 為) without relying upon them, raising without ruling them, is called mysterious virtue. (51)

The activities of virtue in this passage are the same as those in *Daodejing* 2 and 10. While the highest virtue behaves like the *dao*, the lowest virtue (*xià dé* 下德) is characterized by the opposite behavior; it doesn't lose sight of virtue and thus never fails to act for some preconceived purposes (38). Contrary to the highest virtue, which isn't divided into the particular virtues of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*, Laozi thinks that these particular virtues are progressively inferior when compared with the highest virtue. He says,

> the highest humaneness (*ren*) acts but there's no need to act (*wú yǐ wéi* 無以為); the highest appropriateness (*shàng yì* 上義) acts but there is a preconceived purpose. The highest ritual proprieties (*shàng lǐ* 上禮) act but no one responds, sleeves are rolled up and rules are enforced. (38)

Laozi believes that enforcing rules and prohibitions is not only ineffective but perpetuates the ills we're trying to avoid. He says, "The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people…. The more clear the laws and edicts, the more thieves and robbers" (Ivanhoe 2002, Chapter 57). This is in stark contrast with Zhu's view that the governmental principles that make a good ruler are "Distinguishing whether or not someone is of merit in order to determine the difference between high and low, and examining one's merits and demerits in order to impartially give rewards and punishments."[57] Against Zhu's careful distinctions between people's worthiness ↳ and merits for administering praises and punishments, Laozi would deny that we could arrive at the natural (*ziran*) by making such distinctions and applying the corresponding appellations to different people. Laozi would criticize Zhu for thinking that the distinctions between opposites are permanent and for discriminating against certain opposites. He'd regard Zhu's enforcement of rules and regulations as a sign of the failure to understand how opposites are to be harmonized (27).

In line with Zhu's distinctions between the good and bad people is his injunction to cultivate oneself to become virtuous. Cultivation is achieved by overcoming and eliminating selfish desires that inhibit one's knowledge of *dao* as the principle of nature, so that one can act according to the concrete principles of virtue. Zhu emphasizes social customs or ritual proprieties for self-cultivation. He defines social customs as follows: "People knowing the respect of doing good and then invariably doing it, and knowing the shame of being bad and invariably turning away from it."[58] Instead of regarding such social customs or proprieties as the practices to cultivate filial piety in the family, and loyalty and truthfulness in the ministers, (18) as Zhu maintains, Laozi believes that they are a sign of the wearing thin of loyalty (*zhōng* 忠) and truthfulness (*xìn* 信) and the beginning of disorder. Because Laozi would regard the social customs that are embodied in tradition as the mere flower of *dao*, and the origin of stupidity (38), he thinks that the most accomplished people would avoid them and reside in what's actual instead. Unlike Zhu then, self-cultivation isn't the way to know the *dao* for Laozi. Rather, a sage is one who models his behavior after the *dao* in knowing that all things are governed by opposites that are to be harmonized. Instead of acting for his own preconceived purposes, the sage behaves with *wuwei* by not acting for a preconceived purpose and supports all things in their natural conditions.

IX. Challenges for Laozi

For both Laozi and Zhu, it's clear that there's an intimate relation between knowledge of the *dao* and the practice of virtue. For Laozi, the way of the *dao* is what's natural. Everything is governed by what's natural to it, and this is the harmony of opposites for each thing. Despite Laozi's praise of the sage, whose actions are modeled after the indistinctness and indiscriminateness of the *dao* in its support for everything, so that he practices *wuwei* or not acting for some preconceived purpose, it seems that the sage must be partial toward virtue since Laozi asserts that the *dao* itself is always on the side of the good person (79). But how can an indiscriminate *dao* always be on the side of the good person? Correspondingly, how can the sage be indiscriminate in supporting everything and yet always be virtuous? Won't Laozi's sage's behavior of supporting all things contradict the need to harmonize with, rather than exclude, the behavior of *not* supporting all things? More specifically, how can Laozi say that the sage is interested in filling the bellies of the people but wishes to eliminate knowledge? Again, could his sage be biased against conventional knowledge but favor genuine knowledge?

p. 409 The same issue seems to arise in Laozi's assertion about how the good varies depending on the sort of thing it is. For example, when he says that the good of a place lies in its location, the good of relationships lies in humaneness, and the good of speech lies in truthfulness. Unlike Zhu, who advocates the concrete principles of virtue for human beings because these principles already exist in human nature, Laozi insists on not naming things and not insisting that they must be a certain way instead of their opposites. So, it seems that any recommendation to be good, such as the different goods for different things, to be virtuous, or to act in a certain way as exemplified by the sage's behavior, would violate Laozi's own claims about balancing or harmonizing opposites. On the contrary, Zhu's view that the *taiji* and *wuji* already contain the principles of all things enables him to make distinctions between different things and use these principles as the norms of goodness for them. Zhu's position that it is the human mind that can access the principle of nature completely also enables him to maintain consistently that the sage will always act virtuously. In contrast, Laozi's *dao* that insists on harmonizing opposites would make it difficult to maintain that the sage will always be good and discriminate against the opposite of being bad.

X. Challenges for Zhu

There are challenges for Zhu's account of the *dao* as well. Namely, how we can have the same principle of nature or order that inheres in everything and yet have this principle manifested in different ways, so that there are different particular principles in different things dictating their natures? More specifically, if the principle of nature is responsible for order per se, in that everything that exists has a particular order, how does this principle account for the different orders? We've seen that Zhu relies on matter/qi to determine how various things can only access a certain degree of the same principle that inheres in everything. Recall his claim that *taiji* relies on qi for its activity. But such a system seems to take away the priority of *taiji* or principle. One might be tempted to say that Zhu retains the priority of principle by positing *wuji*. Unfortunately, *wuji* is inactive without *taiji*. So, it seems that Zhu's first principle, be it *wuji* or *taiji*, isn't as much of a first principle as Laozi's *dao* given its lack of priority in being a cause. In this case, it seems that Laozi's *dao* has the strength of being a more consistent first principle by being truly prior instead of relying on something else for its activity.

Another related challenge for Zhu is this: How can the specific principles in human nature be arrived at by using the mind to investigate things that are governed by principles that are specific to them? Put otherwise, can we arrive at the principles of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* by investigating ants and huts? Or are we simply supposed to arrive at the general principle of nature that everything has an order by investigating things? If this were the case, why should Zhu recommend an "exhaustive" investigation of things? Won't we be able to arrive at this general principle of order by a more limited investigation of things? Alternatively, if the point of the
p. 410 investigation of things is to arrive at ↳ knowledge of the concrete principles in human nature, and since qi is responsible for the limited abilities of things and their concreteness, shouldn't something that is more akin to qi, like Laozi's body, be the way to understand the concrete principles in human nature and everything else instead of Zhu's candidate of the mind?[59] As such, perhaps it is the body's natural knowledge of its own opposite conditions, as Laozi would have it, that'll enable it to grasp the concrete principles of human nature.[60]

Another issue for Zhu is this: if there are different orders for different things, can they conflict? Even if there's a hierarchy to the order of different things, if human beings are superior to everything since only they can access completely the principle of nature, what's to prevent errors about their access? And if they were mistaken, how could they fulfill their task of assisting Heaven and Earth in enabling other things in the world to flourish? Zhu would attribute such errors to the turbidity of certain people's qi, which he thinks can be rectified by his two-fold cultivation. But Laozi would urge us to be more skeptical and ask about the limits of determinateness or distinctness regarding the cultivated mind of Zhu's sage. Laozi would ask, "Why won't Zhu's sage be forcing things into a preconceived set of purposes that reside in the four virtues he possesses?" In this case, how can the sage assist Heaven and Earth in enabling other things to flourish when his cultivated mind is perfected by the virtues of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*, which are human virtues rather than virtues for all things in general? It seems that Laozi's *dao*, which harmonizes opposites and doesn't discriminate against any opposites, might be better at assisting Heaven and Earth in enabling all things to flourish.

In conclusion, comparing Laozi and Zhu on their accounts of knowledge of the *Dao* and its relation to virtue reveals both similarities and differences between them. More importantly, their respective views on virtue and knowledge offer us resources that can challenge each author's view, which would not have been available had we only examined one of their views.

Notes

1. It is beyond the scope and intent of this chapter to discuss Daoism's influence on Zhu. For such a discussion, see Johanna Lidén (2011).
2. Chapter numbers of the *Daodejing* are provided in the text parenthetically at the end of quotations or paraphrases. All translations from Laozi's *Daodejing* are mine unless otherwise stated.
3. *Further Reflections on Things at Hand* (FRTH, hereafter), Chapter 1, "The Essence of Dao," no. 2 (Zhu 1991: 59). All translations of FRTH are from Zhu (1991). All substitutions of Pinyin for Wade Giles, and minor modifications are mine.
4. FRTH, Chapter 2, "On Learning," no. 35 (Zhu 1991: 78).
5. FRTH, Chapter 1, "The Essence of Dao," no. 65 (Zhu 1991: 69).
6. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 64 (Zhu 1991: 69).
7. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 3 (Zhu 1991: 59).
8. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 74 (Zhu 1991: 70).

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9. *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology* (RTH hereafter), no. 17 (Zhu and Lü 1967: 17). All translations of RTH are from Zhu and Lü (1967).
10. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 53 (Zhu 1991: 67).
11. RTH, no. 32 (Zhu and Lü 1967: 26).
12. For more determinate characteristics of Laozi's *dao*, see Sim (2014: 53–70), specifically p. 60. See note 23 in Sim (2014) for my disagreement with Neville (1991: 55) when he claims that nothing can be said about the *dao* as a source except in reference to its creations. See Sim (2011b: 48–49) for my reasons for disagreeing with Neville. See also Sim (2017: 111), "Since the Way is in everything, opposites are intertwined rather than divided," and Sim (2022: 125), "all things originate from the *Dao*, are nourished …, and caused by it to move spontaneously according to its laws …, they are all endowed with virtue, or the power to move, without any particular shape."
13. FRTH, no. 16 (Zhu 1991: 61).
14. Ivanhoe (2002). More on Laozi's natural and how unhewn wood reflects its qualities, see Sim (2017, 2014, 2011b, 2022).
15. See Sim (2014: 55–56) for my agreement with Koji TANAKA's analysis of naming and how for Laozi, distinctions between opposites can't be constant and hence, can't provide a constant guide to social harmony. See Sim (2022: 134) for why

naming doesn't capture how things change because all things move toward the nothing for Laozi.

16. See Sim (2011a) for how *wuwei* for Liezi also doesn't mean not acting at all. In this respect, Liezi and Laozi are similar in their understanding of *wuwei*.

17. (Hansen 1992: 213). Similarly, as I've pointed out (Sim 2014, note 15), "*wuwei* means not being partial in a personal or parochial way." Following Paul Goldin, "*wei* implies action that is undertaken from a partial or parochial worldview, an intervention in discord with the spontaneously perfect and all-encompassing flow of the *dao*" (Sim 2014, note 15). And Koji TANAKA (2004: 199) says, "to *wei* is to act based on socially induced preferences." See Sim (2017: 114–15) for more on *wuwei*.

18. RTH, no. 25 (Zhu and Lü 1967: 22).

19. RTH, no. 25 (Zhu and Lü 1967: 22).

20. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 53 (Zhu 1991: 67).

21. FRTH, no. 57 (Zhu 1991: 68).

22. RTH, no. 1, (Zhu and Lü 1967: 5).

23. Chan (1963: 639, 49:11a–b). When citing Wing-tsit CHAN's translation of ZHU Xi (1963), I will also provide the *juan* 卷 number and pages from the 1714 edition of the *Complete Works of Master Zhu* (*Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書) as cited by Chan.

24. Chan (1963: 629, 44:6b–7a).

25. Chan (1963: 619, 42:21b–22a).

26. RTH, no. 1 (Zhu and Lü 1967: 5).

27. See Chan (1963: 613, 42: 4b), where he translates "qi" as "material force."

28. Chan (1963: 630, 45: 1a).

29. Chan (1963: 641, 49: 14a).

30. Chan (1963: 606, 2: 4b).

31. Chan (1963: 616, 42: 6b–7a).

32. Chan (1963: 606, 2: 4b; 616, 42: 6b–7a).

33. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 4 (Zhu 1991: 59).

34. FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 15 (Zhu 1991: 61).

p. 412 35. Chan (1963: 615, 43). Explaining CHENG Yi, Zhu says, "In man, humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are his nature." See also FRTH no. 20 (Zhu 1991: 62)

36. Chan (1963: 595).

37. Chan (1963: 619, 53).

38. Chan (1963: 605, 2).

39. FRTH, no. 15 (Zhu 1991: 89).

40. FRTH, no. 49 (Zhu 1991: 67).

41. FRTH, no. 13 (Zhu 1991: 75).

42. FRTH, no. 28 (Zhu 1991: 77). See Stephen Angle (2011), especially p. 187, for an elaboration on the kind of

transformation from disciplining our "physical-cum-emotional" selves.

43. Chan (1963: 611, 30).

44. FRTH, no. 16 (Zhu 1991: 107). Again, Zhu says, "That which is inherent in things is principle. That by which things are managed is moral principles" (RTH, Chapter 1, no. 15) (Zhu and Lü 1967: 16). Because Zhu thinks that everything, human and nonhuman, is endowed with moral principles, he doesn't distinguish between theoretical and moral knowledge. As I put it, Zhu's "first principles of virtue are continuous between the nonhuman and human realm" (p. 78) and "Of the thousands and tens of thousands of human beings and all things, there is none independent of these moral principles" (FRTH, Chapter 1, no. 3 [Zhu 1991: 59]). See Sim (2010: 77–90, Chapter 6). See also Galia Patt-Shamir (2004: 349–62), for a reading that also emphasizes the continuity of morality between the Great Ultimate, human beings and everything else in the cosmos. Nevertheless, I think that Patt-Shamir goes too far in emphasizing the human element in her reading such that she makes human life the foundation of *ren* rather than the Great Ultimate. See especially pp. 356 and 359, for what I think is her overemphasis of the power of human beings.

45. FRTH, no. 26 (Zhu 1991: 77).

46. FRTH, no. 23 (Zhu 1991: 67).

47. FRTH, no. 15 (Zhu 1991: 15).

48. Angle (2011: 193) cites Suk CHOI's unpublished work, "Chu Hsi on *Ching* (Reverence 敬): Virtue or Not?" saying, "Zhu says that reverence is to 'make single-mindedness the master without distraction,'" which I think makes "reverential attention" an illuminating translation of "*jing*" too. I'm grateful to Justin Tiwald for this suggestion.

49. FRTH, no. 12 (Zhu 1991: 39): Zhu says, "Today's people know how to look for their chickens and dogs but they do not know how to look for their lost minds…. We don't have to wait and look for it somewhere else since the total substance and function of our minds is already right here. From this, if we maintain our concentration in order to preserve its substance, and thoroughly investigate principles in order to extend its function, then there will be daily increase and monthly benefit, and should we wish to stop we will be unable to do so." See (Sim 2010: 84) for my elaboration of the relation between the investigation of things for Zhu and moral goodness: "Zhu Xi believes that because *li* 理 is one for all things, the investigation of things (*géwù* 格物) will not only lead to knowledge of these things, but also to right actions. Since things and man share the same *li*, which *li* is always good, nothing in the world is devoid of moral principles. Thus, *gewu* and knowledge of things can lead to moral goodness."

50. FRTH no. 1 (Zhu 1991: 97).

51. FRTH no. 9 (Zhu 1991: 98). Stephen Angle explains Zhu's criticism of meditation to grasp the pure goodness of the mind by citing Zhu's "letter to the Gentlemen of Hunan," "the unactualized (*wèifā* 未發) state cannot be sought and the state after we are conscious [of ↳ feelings] permits no manipulation." Angle says, "What this meant was that one could not experience feelings that had not yet been actualized—there is no introspective end-run around this conceptual truth—and yet once one has already responded to a situation, it is too late to really fix things." (Angle 2011: 192–93).

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52. FRTH, no. 12 (Zhu 1991: 106).

53. FRTH, no. 1 (Zhu 1991: 97). That reverence/reverential attention (*jìng* 敬) is involved in both types of cultivation, see Angle (2011: 187).

54. As I put it in Sim (2010: 80), "Zhu Xi speaks of the proper feelings as the function of one's nature. For Zhu Xi, this means that one ought to feel commiseration, shame, deference and compliance. Further, one is to distinguish right from wrong because one is endowed with the moral principles of humaneness (*rén* 仁), appropriateness (*yì* 義), propriety (*lǐ* 禮), and wisdom (*zhì* 智). Put otherwise, one's human nature dictates the proper functioning of one's feelings."

55. FRTH, no. 11 (Zhu 1991: 106). See Angle (2011: 194) for his analysis of how reverence enables one to unify one's inner aspect for Zhu, which in turn enables one to act impartially.

56. Sim (2014: 61).

57. FRTH, no. 24 (Zhu 1991: 133). See Angle (2011: 186–87) for his helpful analysis of five functions of ritual cultivation.

58. FRTH, no. 24 (Zhu 1991: 133).

59. This is the opposite way that the more idealistic, *Xinxue* (心學) school of neo-Confucianism, composed of thinkers like LU Xiangshan (1139–1193) and WANG Yangming (1472–1529), took in contrast to Zhu's rationalistic, *Lixue* (理學) school. Instead of investigating the principles of things, the idealistic proponents maintain that only an investigation of the mind itself is needed to arrive at the principle of nature. See Lidén (2011: 173).

60. The option of relying on the body's knowledge is not open to Zhu because he distinguishes human nature from human physical nature. As I quoted Zhu (Sim 2010), "Man's nature is nothing but principle…. It is not a concrete entity by itself which is to be destined as nature and which neither comes into nor goes out of existence" (Chan 1963: 614, 42:5a). On the contrary, "when physical nature is spoken of, it refers to principle (*lǐ* 理) and material force (*qì* 氣) combined" (Chan 1963: 613, 42:4b).

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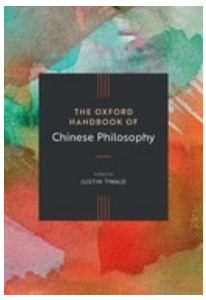

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CHAPTER

21 Knowing-To in Wang Yangming

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Abstract

WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) is famously associated with the view that knowledge and action are unified (*zhī xíng hé yī* 知行合一). Call this the unity thesis. Given standard assumptions about what it means for a person to know, it may seem that the unity thesis is clearly false: one can know that *p* without currently acting in *p*-related ways, and one can know how to *φ* without currently *φ*-ing. The aims in this chapter are, first, to draw on recent work in epistemology to explain and defend the unity thesis and, second, to argue that it offers us an attractive conceptual alternative to a standard way of thinking about the nature of intentional action. The first step of the argument draws on the idea that what distinguishes intentional actions from bodily events is the presence of *knowing-to*—that is, an agent is *φ*-ing intentionally if and only if she is currently doing something because she *knows to* do it as a way for her to *φ*. Such a notion of knowing-to allows scholars to explain otherwise puzzling features of the unity thesis, including the claim that knowing and acting occur simultaneously. In the second step, this chapter argues that the unity thesis can help avoid various long-standing issues in the philosophy of action, including the problem of deviant (formal) causation.

Keywords: Wang Yangming, Confucianism, intentional action, epistemology, knowledge, knowing-to, causal deviance

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I. Introduction

WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), also known as WANG Shouren 王守仁, is perhaps best known for his theory that knowledge and action are unified (*zhī xíng hé yī* 知行合一). I will henceforth call this the unity thesis. My aims in this chapter are, first, to draw on recent work in epistemology to explain and defend the unity thesis and, second, to argue that it offers us an attractive conceptual alternative to a standard way of thinking about the nature of intentional action. Part of the reason why it is attractive is that it helps us avoid various long-standing issues in the philosophy of action, including the problem of deviant (formal) causation.

An important aim of much contemporary philosophy of action is to explain the difference between actions performed intentionally, say, when Farmer Zhang is cutting onions to make dinner for his family, and actions performed unintentionally, say, when a person is serving rice and drops some of it on the floor. A popular suggestion is that Farmer Zhang's action of cutting onions is intentional, because it appropriately matches up with certain *purely inner* mental states of his, such as his intention to cut onions or his belief that what he is currently doing amounts to cutting onions. These mental states are "purely inner" in the sense that they can be present without any specific action being performed.[1] For example, Farmer Zhang's intention to cut onions is purely inner, because Farmer Zhang can be intending to cut onions without, in fact, currently doing so (because, say, he cannot find his knife). Hence, the purely inner component of Farmer Zhang's action has to fit his bodily movements in the right way for his action to count as intentionally performed. The problem with such an analysis of intentional action is that it is notoriously difficult to give a satisfying account of what that "right way" is supposed to be.

I return to this issue in the course of this chapter, and I argue that WANG Yangming provides us with a conception of intentional action that avoids the issue of having to specify the "right way" that purely inner mental states match up with overt bodily movements. For Wang, it is *knowledge* that plays a special role in explaining human action, rather than an agent's intentions, desires, or beliefs. Whereas an intention, desire, or relevant belief is a purely inner mental state—in the sense that having it does not entail that you are *φ*-ing—the unity thesis implies that you cannot be *φ*-ing without (relevantly) knowing, and you cannot be (relevantly) knowing without *φ*-ing. Therefore, according to WANG Yangming, the relevant kind of knowledge is not "purely inner" in the sense that it can be had without acting.[2] Part of the aim of this chapter is to explain what this means and to defend it as a plausible conceptual option.

WANG Yangming's unity thesis is as famous as it is controversial, and it is not my aim to settle the debate on how exactly we should interpret it. My focus in this chapter lies on examining what lessons we can learn about the role of knowledge in action from Wang's unity thesis. However, I take my argument to contribute to the broader debate on WANG Yangming exegesis in at least two ways. First, unlike some commentators, I take the unity thesis to hold true not only of morally virtuous actions, but of all intentional actions. Hence, I take WANG Yangming to be saying that knowledge is a condition on intentional action.[3] I offer an argument for this in Section II.

Second, WANG Yangming makes clear that it is not *all* knowledge that is unified with action, but only a specific kind of knowledge. He calls it "genuine knowledge" (*zhēn zhī* 真知; IPL 5, 125, 133, 168, 170, 189), knowledge in its "original condition" (*běn tǐ* 本體; IPL 133, 165; cf. IPL 155), or "extended knowledge" (*zhì zhī* 致知; IPL 138, 139, 140, 321).[4] Hence, for WANG Yangming, only some knowledge is unified with action—and I will henceforth call it *knowledge-in-action*. Wang takes such knowledge-in-action to have some sort of primacy over other kinds of knowledge, although the question of how exactly they are related is beyond the scope of this chapter.[5] My aim is to show that Wang's notion of knowledge-in-action can be helpfully explicated in terms of the concept of *knowing-to*: an agent has knowledge-in- action if and only if she knows to do *this* for her to *φ*, where "this" stands for something that the agent is currently doing.

Such an approach agrees with an influential line of thought defended in a series of papers by HUANG Yong (2017, 2021, 2022a, 2022b)—namely, that the unity thesis concerns a kind of knowledge that is in some ways distinct from knowledge-that, knowledge-how, or knowledge of things, and that we should label it "knowing-to." But I have doubts whether Huang's notion of "knowing-to" is as helpful as it may seem, and I give reasons for preferring a different conception of knowing-to in Section III.

Finally, in Section IV, I argue that the unity thesis offers us a promising alternative to a standard picture on which actions are distinguished from bodily events by the mental states that cause them.

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II. Which Actions Are Unified with Knowledge?

Part of the aim of this chapter is to argue that the following view is plausible. For WANG Yangming, if an action is an intentional action, then it is unified with knowledge. I therefore take it to be plausible that Wang's unity thesis entails the view that knowing is necessary for intentionally acting.

Against this, one might object that Wang restricts the scope of the unity thesis to only apply to those actions that are morally virtuous, rather than to all intentional actions.[6] But I do not think this is right. I agree that Wang takes all virtuous actions to be actions that are unified with knowledge, but I disagree that he *only* takes virtuous actions to be unified with knowledge. My evidence for this comes from one of Wang's arguments for his unity thesis:

> No one really learns anything without carrying it into action. Take the learning of filial piety. One must relieve one's parents of the burden of toil, serve and care for them, and personally put the principle of filial piety into action before one can be said to be learning filial piety. Can merely talking about it in a vacuum be considered as learning? To learn archery, one must hold out the bow, fix the arrow to the string, draw the bow, and take aim. To learn writing, one must lay out the paper, take the brush, hold the inkwell, and dip the brush into the ink. In all the world, nothing can be considered learning that does not involve action. […] Therefore if we realize that no learning can be considered learning if it is not carried into action, […] we know that knowledge and action are a unity and advance simultaneously, and cannot be separated. (IPL 136)

In this passage, Wang argues that knowledge and action form a unity, because a person's knowledge-in-action is improved at the same time as her acting is improved—that is, the knowledge-in-action that features in a person's *φ*-ing improves the better she gets at *φ*-ing.[7] What is relevant for my argument is that Wang claims that this applies to knowing *archery* as much as it applies to knowing filial piety. If Wang takes the simultaneous improvement of knowing and acting to support the unity thesis, then the argument from IPL 136 suggests that some nonmoral acting forms a unity with knowing in the same way that morally virtuous acting does. Therefore, it is plausible that Wang takes the unity thesis to hold true of some nonmoral actions as much as it holds true of morally virtuous actions.

Although it is correct that morally virtuous actions frequently appear in IPL as examples of the kind of actions that are relevantly unified with knowledge (e.g., IPL 5, 134, 140, 291), it would be too quick to conclude that Wang takes the unity thesis to *only* apply to morally virtuous actions.

A different objection one might raise against my proposal is that it is not obvious that Wang takes *all* intentional actions to involve
p. 418 knowing-in-action. Although Wang's ↳ argument for the unity thesis at IPL 136 involves an appeal to intentional actions, that is, the act of deliberate practice involved in becoming a better archer, one might wonder if, for Wang, some intentional actions are not unified with knowledge.

It is more difficult to prove that Wang took all intentional actions to be unified with knowledge-in-action, because Wang's focus is not to give us a theory of intentional action. But I believe that there is some room for optimism here. At IPL 5, Wang makes the following observation: "knowing is acting's intent (*xíng de zhǔ yì* 行的主意) and acting is knowing's practice."[8] If all actions relevant to the unity thesis are actions with "intent," then it seems to me at least plausible that they are intentional actions. Hence, all intentional actions are unified with knowledge-in-action, and having knowledge-in-action is a necessary condition for acting intentionally.

The challenge is to make sense of Wang's notion of knowledge-in-action. What is it that a person supposedly knows when she is performing an action that is unified with her knowledge? I turn to this issue in the next section.

III. Knowing-in-Action and Knowing-To

In the first section, I have pointed out that Wang's unity thesis is not a thesis about *all* knowledge, but only about what he calls "genuine" or "extended knowledge"—namely, knowledge-in-action. In this section, I argue that the relevant kind of knowledge is best understood as *knowing-to*: S's φ-ing is unified with her knowing if and only if S is knowing to do *this* for her to φ.[9]

Knowing-to differs conceptually from knowing-that and knowing-how in ways that I will discuss in a moment. Moreover, knowing-to also differs from the kind of knowledge that HUANG Yong has recently proposed as a candidate for interpreting the unity thesis. According to Huang (2017, 2021, 2022a, 2022b), only knowledge that necessarily motivates its possessor to act is unified with the agent's action. Huang argues that all such knowledge involves propositions with an "ought"-clause: if I possess knowledge unified with action, then I know that I ought to φ and I am thereby motivated to φ.[10] I will return to Huang's view later. For now, I offer an argument for why I believe that Wang's unity thesis is best understood in terms of knowing-to. My argument is that knowing-to exhibits many of the characteristics that Wang attributes to the kind of knowledge that is unified with action.

i. No Knowing without Acting

A central implication of the unity thesis is that you cannot be knowing-in-action without acting:

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> People today separate knowing and acting into two distinct tasks and think that one must first know and only then can one act. They say, "Now I will perform the task of knowing, by studying and learning. Once I have attained real knowledge, I then will pursue the task of acting." And so, till the end of their days, they never act, and till the end of their days, they never know. […] My current teaching regarding the unity of knowing and acting is a medicine directed precisely at this disease. (IPL 5)

Wang is clear that the unity thesis is directed against the view, advocated by some of his contemporaries, that knowing-in-action can temporally precede acting. In response, he writes elsewhere at IPL 5 that, "knowledge is the beginning of action" (*xíng zhī shǐ* 行之始) and "action is the completion of knowledge" (*zhī zhī chéng* 知之成), so that "[t]here never have been people who are knowing but do not act."[11] If a person's relevant knowing is the beginning of her corresponding action, then I take it that her relevant knowing is sufficient for acting. Hence, an instance of knowing-in-action cannot temporally precede a corresponding instance of acting.

But it is clear that knowledge-that and knowledge-how *can* temporally precede at least some of the actions that manifest them. I can know that *p* without currently acting in any *p*-related ways. For example, I can know that Sparta won the Peloponnesian War even if I have never told anyone about it. Likewise, I can know how to cook an omelette without currently making one. Commentators on WANG Yangming have struggled to make sense of his claim that possessing relevant knowledge is sufficient for acting, and I believe that part of the reason might be the widely held and plausible assumption that knowledge is a standing state that a person can be in without having to exercise it. It is not that you *cease* to know that *p* when you are not currently performing *p*-related actions.

Knowing-to, however, is only present when the relevant action is. Adapting one of Wang's examples from IPL 136, suppose you have fixed an arrow on a bow string and are drawing the bow with the aim of hitting a target in front of you. As you are drawing the bow, you might know to draw the bow *this* far for you to hit the target, given the specific details of your situation—for example, the distance of the target away from you, the presence and strength of the wind, the size of the bow relative to your height, and so on. The claim is that, if you are knowing to do *this* (i.e., draw the bow *this* far), then you are knowing-to. If you are not drawing the bow far enough for you to hit your target, or if you are merely guessing how far to draw the bow without knowing it, then you are not *knowing to* draw the bow far enough.

Given that what it means to draw the bow *this* far to hit a target is situation specific, it is plausible that the content of knowing-to is only available to the agent as she is performing the relevant action.[12] If an archer must know to draw the bow *this* far to hit her target under *these* specific circumstances, then she will not have the required situation-specific knowledge when she is currently at home reading a book. It is not that the archer carries in her head a maximally fine-grained blueprint of how far to draw a bow given the

p. 420 specific details of various situations. Put simply, an agent's knowing-to does ↳ not temporally precede her corresponding action, and hence it offers us an elegant way of making sense of an important aspect of Wang's unity thesis.[13]

Moreover, such a proposal can also help explain why Wang says that knowledge-in-action is the *beginning* of a corresponding act. If a person is in apt circumstances for her to φ and she knows how to φ, then that is not enough for her to φ, because she must also put her know-how into practice. To put know-how into practice, what is required is knowing-to (Hetherington 2022a: 18–20)—more specifically, without your knowing to do *this* to φ, where "this" involves an enactment of a way for you to φ, it is hard to see how your know-how can be applied in your φ-ing. The moment that you know to cut onions to make dinner on a particular occasion, you have begun making dinner, because you have begun enacting part of a way for you to make dinner, and hence you have begun putting relevant know-how into practice. Therefore, it is plausible to conceive of knowing-to as the beginning of an agent's φ-ing, whereas it is implausible for knowing-that or knowing-how to be so conceived.[14]

One might object that there is a way to take the expression "S is knowing to φ" that is incompatible with my argument. For example, one might claim that it is perfectly intelligible to say: "Farmer Zhang knew to be polite to the government's envoy, but he did not know what it meant to be polite in that particular situation, and so he was not polite when greeting the envoy." In this case, Farmer Zhang did not *know how* to be polite and so he failed to be polite, even though he knew *to* be polite. Hence, one might object that some instances of "S knows to φ" are instances of S's knowing that she *ought to* φ.

That may very well be so. My proposal does not rule out that there is a way of taking "knowing to" in terms of the agent's knowing that she ought to do something. The suggestion is rather that not all cases of "knowing to" are a species of knowing-that. Therefore, although Farmer Zhang knows that he must be polite to the envoy, and he knows how to be polite toward envoys, it turns out that, in this instance, as Farmer Zhang was greeting the envoy, he did not *know to* greet the envoy in *this* way for him to greet politely.

In response, could one suggest that the reason why Farmer Zhang does not know to greet the government's envoy in a polite way is because he does not know that he *ought* to greet the envoy in *this* way? No, because that gets the modality of knowing-to wrong. For example, there are many ways for you to dice an onion. If you know to perform *these* specific bodily movements to dice an onion, then it does not follow that moving the knife at this angle, holding the onion with this specific grip, cutting at this speed, and so on, are actions that you *ought* to perform to dice the onion. Knowing to do *this* to dice an onion entails knowing to dice it in one (but not the *only* one) of the available ways of doing so. Hence, knowing to do *this* for you to dice an onion does not entail knowing that you *ought* to do *this* for you to dice an onion, because it is simply false that you *ought* to move the knife at this specific angle for you to cut the onion. In a similar vein, knowing that you ought to do *this* for you to φ does not entail knowing-to. I can know that I ought to fry eggs to make an omelette without knowing how to fry eggs, and hence without knowing to do *this* (e.g., heat up the pan, melt the butter) to make the omelette.

p. 421 ii. Acting and Knowing Occur Simultaneously

WANG Yangming offers the following argument in support of his unity thesis:

> Knowing pain offers another good example. One must already be in pain oneself in order to know pain. [Similarly,] one must already be cold oneself in order to know cold, and one must already be hungry oneself in order to know hunger. How can knowing and acting be separated? (IPL 5)

The argument seems to be this. The relation between a person's (relevant) knowing and her acting is analogous to the relation between a person's knowing pain and experiencing pain. Just as knowing pain is unified with experiencing pain, so a person's (relevant) knowing is unified with her acting.

One might interpret Wang to be saying that a person can know pain some time after she has stopped experiencing it. Such a reading implies that a person who is not currently φ-ing anymore can still be said to possess knowledge that is unified with her φ-ing. This requires us to construe the unity of A and B in a way that is compatible with saying that you can have A without B, and hence it requires us to explain away those passages that suggest that a person cannot be knowing without acting.

I believe that there is a more straightforward alternative. We can take Wang to be saying that a person is *knowing* pain so long as she is experiencing it, and the moment her pain ceases, she might know what the pain was like, but she is no longer *knowing* pain.[15] Hence, just as knowing pain and experiencing pain occur simultaneously, so (relevantly) knowing and acting occur simultaneously. To Wang's claim that a person cannot be knowing without acting, we may now add, "without action, there can be no extension of knowledge" (IPL 139; IPL 133). The unity thesis therefore entails that knowledge-in-action occurs simultaneously with its corresponding action.[16]

There is a simple way to make sense of Wang's simultaneity claim. A person who is knowing pain knows that the sensation she is currently undergoing is painful. If she didn't know that her sensation was painful, she wouldn't be experiencing pain. Analogously, a person who is knowing-to knows to perform what she is currently doing as a way for her to φ. If she didn't know to do *this* to enact a way for her to φ, she wouldn't be intentionally φ-ing. Hence, there is a similarity between knowing-to and knowing occurrent sensations—a similarity that, I believe, forms the basis of Wang's argument.

Wang exegesis aside, I believe that one reason why the simultaneity claim has wider philosophical relevance is this. It implies that knowing-to is necessary for acting intentionally. If Farmer Zhang does not know to do *this* to politely welcome a governmental envoy, but, unbeknownst to Farmer Zhang, the way he greeted the envoy just turned out to be the polite way of greeting a government official, his lack of knowing-to explains why his otherwise polite greeting was an accident. This also helps explain, for example, why it does not seem possible for you to intentionally win a fair lottery. You cannot know whether drawing this particular number is a way for you to win the lottery, and hence you are not in a position to *know to* draw this particular number to win. Hence,
p. 422 if ↳ a person does not know to do *this* for her to φ, then even if she does something that accidentally coincides with a way for her to φ, she cannot be said to be φ-ing intentionally.

iii. Objection: KnowingEntails Being Motivated to Act

One might draw on the following passage to raise an objection against the proposal I have defended so far:

> The *Great Learning* gives us examples of genuine knowing and acting, saying that it is "like loving a beautiful sight or hating a bad odor." Seeing a beautiful sight is a case of knowing, while loving a beautiful sight is a case of acting. As soon as one sees that beautiful sight, one naturally loves it. It is not as if you first see it and only then, intentionally, you decide to love it. Smelling a bad odor is a case of knowing, while hating a bad odor is a case of acting. As soon as one smells that bad odor, one naturally hates it. It is not as if you first smell it and only then, intentionally, you decide to hate it. Consider the case of a person with a stuffed-up nose. Even if he sees a malodorous object right in front of him, the smell does not reach him, and so he does not hate it. This is simply not to know the bad odor. (IPL5)

According to IPL 5, WANG Yangming says that experiencing a beautiful sight is relevantly analogous to the "knowing" part of his unity thesis, and loving a beautiful sight is relevantly analogous to the "acting" part. But loving a beautiful sight is an affective response, one that (presumably) entails having desires. Therefore, the "acting" part of Wang's thesis entails having desires. If knowing is unified with something that entails having desires, then knowing must entail having desires as well. Neither knowing-that nor knowing-how entails having desires, because you can know that p or know how to φ without necessarily wanting to perform any of the corresponding actions. According to Huang (2017, 2021, 2022a, 2022b), the only plausible candidate for the kind of knowledge that is necessarily accompanied by a desire is knowledge that you ought to φ. Hence, Wang's point is that there is some knowledge the possession of which necessarily motivates the knower to act. This is, according to some interpreters, what the unity thesis amounts to: if you are (relevantly) knowing, then you necessarily have the corresponding motivation to act (see, e.g., Ivanhoe 2000: 63–64; 2009: 113; Lee 2023: 116). One might therefore object that my interpretation cannot make sense of the fact that (relevant) knowledge is necessarily action motivating, and hence that my interpretation is inadequate.

What the objection gets right is that Wang is clearly interested in motivating his students to act virtuously, that being so motivated is characteristic of virtuous people, and that Wang proposes the unity thesis partly because he believes that accepting it will aid his students in their task of becoming virtuous (e.g., IPL 5, 26). However, the objection fails, because it rests on a misreading.

p. 423 Consider the following case. Farmer Zhang knows that he ought to save a child when it is about to fall into a well; suppose that he is also motivated to act accordingly. If you prefer to think that Farmer Zhang has a "moral commitment" (Angle 2009: Chapter 7), a "wholehearted inclination" free of motivational conflict (Lederman 2022b: 207–8), or is in some other affective state, feel free to augment the case as you see fit. In situation C, there is a child that is about to fall into a well and Farmer Zhang rushes to save it. In situation not-C, there is no such child; hence Farmer Zhang is not saving any children threatened by wells. In C, Farmer Zhang is (relevantly) knowing and acting. But in not-C, he is (relevantly) knowing and not acting. Nothing about Farmer Zhang's knowledge of what he ought to do (or his motivation, moral commitment, etc.) has changed between C and not-C, and yet in one case he is acting, but in the other case he is not. Hence, an agent can be (relevantly) knowing without acting. But Wang clearly says that one cannot be knowing without acting. And so, the objection fails to make sense of Wang's unity thesis.

Someone sympathetic toward the standard proposal might respond in various ways. One way is by saying that Farmer Zhang's (relevant) knowledge is partly a *disposition* to save others in C, and that a disposition to φ in C is unified with φ-ing in C. But such a proposal faces the problem that a person can be disposed to φ in apt circumstances without ever being in those circumstances. Hence, a person can be disposed to φ without ever φ-ing. But WANG Yangming is clear that knowing is unified with *acting*. It would be implausibly misleading if Wang had meant to say that a person who is not currently doing anything is nonetheless acting by virtue of being disposed to act.

A second, more promising way to respond is by appealing to mental acts, rather than dispositions. The suggestion is that, although nothing about Farmer Zhang's knowledge has changed between C and not-C, nothing about his knowledge-relevant acting has changed either. Farmer Zhang is relevantly acting in not-C, when he is not saving children, as much as he is relevantly acting in C, when he is saving children. The reason why Farmer Zhang is relevantly acting in both C and not-C is because in both situations he is *desiring* to save threatened children, and Wang claims that desiring is itself a mental action (e.g., IPL 132). Hence, on this reading, Wang's unity thesis should not be understood as saying that (relevant) knowing is unified with φ-ing but, rather, that it is unified with the mental act of *desiring* to φ.[17] Experiencing a beautiful sight is related to loving a beautiful sight, as knowing that I ought to φ is related to desiring to φ.

One might worry that such a response misleadingly construes the unity thesis to be about mental acts, rather than overt bodily events. But there is an even deeper problem here. Recall that one feature of Wang's notion of unity is simultaneity: if X and Y are unified, then I cannot have X without at the same time having Y, and I cannot have Y without at the same time having X. Therefore, if seeing a beautiful sight is unified with loving a beautiful sight, then I cannot have one without at the same time having the other. I take this to mean that a person can love an occurrent sensation only if she is experiencing it. But it is surely false that a person's knowing that she ought to φ is unified in this way with her desire to φ. This is because I can desire to φ without simultaneously
p. 424 knowing whether I ought to φ. For example, I can be unsure as to whether I ought to ↳ tell my friend a hurtful truth even though I really want to tell her. If this is right, then desiring to φ does not entail knowing that I ought to φ, and the two do not form a unity.[18]

I set the objection aside, but I draw a possible lesson from it. I speculate that, perhaps, commentators on Wang's unity thesis have struggled to make sense of the claim that knowing and acting are unified, because they not only share popular assumptions about knowledge but also about action. As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, on a widely endorsed theory of action, what explains that I am intentionally raising my arm is that some purely inner mental states, such as beliefs, desires, or intentions, appropriately set into motion the bodily event of my arm going up. This is, of course, an instance of the causal theory of action, which is also known as the "standard story" of intentional action (see Smith 2004, 2010). It implies a view on which intentional actions are composed out of a purely inner mental state and some overt bodily movements. But, of course, the presence of any such mental state does not guarantee that the corresponding bodily event will occur. It is therefore difficult to make sense of the claim that knowing and acting form a unity, given that, at best, knowledge might be able to set a bodily event into motion, but the presence of knowledge on its own, even when augmented by desire, does not guarantee that any action will occur. I speculate that this might be the reason why many commentators on WANG Yangming retreat from saying that knowing and *acting* are unified and instead propose that knowing and *intending* (or *desiring*) to act are unified.

I do not believe that we have to resort to such a roundabout way of making sense of Wang's unity thesis. What I see as Wang's basic idea is that knowledge can be present *in* the action, rather than causing or guiding the action from the outside. This not only has the exegetical advantages I have described earlier. It is also independently attractive because it offers us a way of thinking about the

nature of action that avoids some long-standing issues in contemporary philosophy of action. In what follows, I focus on one of these issues—namely, the problem of deviant causation.

IV. The Unity Thesis and the Problem of Deviant Causation

An influential way of thinking about intentional action is that, for an action to be intentional, it must appropriately match up with the agent's intentions, and intentions provide motivation and plans for action (e.g., Bishop 1989; Bratman 1987; Shepherd 2021).

The problem with such a view is that, sometimes, a person can intend to φ, succeed at φ-ing, and yet not have φ-ed intentionally, because the link between the agent's φ-ing and her intention to φ is too accidental. In many such cases, the agent's φ-ing does not amount to intentionally φ-ing because her action is *deviantly caused* by her intention. A classic example of deviant causation is given
p. 425 by Davidson (1980): a mountaineer intends to murder his companion by letting go of the rope during a trip, but ↳ his intention to do so makes him so nervous that, at some point during their climb, he loses his grip and his companion falls to his death. Although his action of letting go of the rope ends up matching his intention, it only does so accidentally. This is because the mountaineer's intention causes his nervousness, and the nervousness causes him to lose his grip. Therefore, his intention does not cause the companion's fall in the *right way* for the mountaineer's action to count as intentional.

As it turns out, it is very difficult to give a satisfying account of what that "right way" is supposed to be. Moreover, there is some reason to be skeptical about our prospects. Epistemologists interested in the nature of knowledge have faced a structurally similar problem: if we decompose knowledge into a purely inner mental component (belief) and an external one (the truth of a proposition expressed by the belief), then we must give an account of how these two components relate to one another for them to yield knowledge. The simple fact that epistemologists have failed to offer an explanation that survives (Gettier-style) counterexamples, despite the large amount of highly specialized work that this question has produced over the last 60 years, suggests that the problem might be intractable.[19] But if the problem of deviant causation and the Gettier problem are structurally similar, and the Gettier problem might be intractable, then we have reason to believe that the problem of deviant causation will continue to be a problem in philosophy of action.

One promising way forward, therefore, is to reject the underlying assumption that has led us to causal deviance—and that is the assumption that your bodily movements constitute actions if and only if they are appropriately caused by specific purely inner mental states. If we understand intentional action in terms of knowing-to, we therefore avoid having to specify the right way in which an agent's purely inner mental states have to match her overt bodily movements, because knowing-to is not a purely inner mental state, nor does it cause a person's acting. The problem of deviant causation does not arise.

In response to my proposal, one might object that noncausal accounts (such as the one I am proposing) face their own worries about causal deviance. Sarah Paul (2011) draws attention to one such deviance problem, which she develops specifically for Anscombean noncausal approaches—namely, the problem of *deviant formal causation*.

According to Anscombe's (1957) influential proposal, a person is acting intentionally just in case she knows what she is doing as she is doing it. But Paul argues that such a view has difficulty distinguishing an intentional action from the foreseen *side effects* of the action. Adapting one of Anscombe's own examples, Paul suggests that we can imagine a case of two gardeners, both of whom know that they are currently pumping poisoned water into a cistern and that doing so will (i) get them paid for the job and (ii) poison the inhabitants. Gardener A finds poisoning the inhabitants undesirable and pumps poisoned water for the sake of getting paid. For him, poisoning the inhabitants is not his aim but a foreseen side effect of his act of pumping water into the cistern. But Gardener B aims to poison the inhabitants and pumps water for the sake of doing so. For him, getting paid is but a welcome side effect. Intuitively, the
p. 426 actions performed by Gardener A and Gardener B are not identical. And yet, the two gardeners are in the same ↳ epistemic state: they both know, in the same way, what they are doing as they are doing it. This is a problem for an Anscombean noncausal account of intentional action.

But it is not a problem for WANG Yangming. Reading Wang's unity thesis in terms of knowing-to allows us to avoid the problem of deviant formal causation, because we can reject the claim that Gardener A and B are in the same epistemic state, while granting

Paul's (2011) argument that both of them have the same propositional knowledge of what they are doing. The reason why they epistemically differ is because they differ in their knowing-to. Gardener A knows to do *this* to get paid, while Gardener B knows to do *this* to poison the inhabitants. Presumably, if Gardener A were to be unsure as to whether doing *this* will get him paid, he would change course, whereas Gardener B would not.[20]

Insofar as we can explain acting intentionally in terms of the enactment of knowledge, and we can explain the enactment of knowledge in terms of knowing-to, I believe that we are offered an analysis of intentional action that avoids the problem of deviant causation. Although I cannot offer a complete defense of such a view here, I hope to have shown that Wang's unity thesis can not only be given an exegetically fitting interpretation; it also has the potential to offer us a plausible alternative way of thinking about the nature of intentional action.[21]

Notes

1. I adopt this usage from Valaris (2022a). Henceforth, I bracket the question of whether mental states are "purely inner" in some other way, e.g., in the sense of being vaguely located "in the mind" (see Slingerland [2019] for a discussion on whether early Chinese philosophers employed such a notion of psychological interiority).

2. Hence, I take Wang, in effect, to agree with Anscombe (1957) on the special role that knowledge plays in explaining intentional action. However, I do not take Wang to be committed to a broadly Anscombian account of practical knowledge. I return to this in Section IV.

3. This does not mean (nor do I intend to argue) that *only* intentional actions are unified with knowledge. It is likely that, for Wang, some nonintentional actions (specifically mental actions) are also unified with knowledge. I bracket such a possibility here. My claim is that, according to the unity thesis, knowledge is unified with all but perhaps not only intentional actions.

4. For a good analysis of how these terms are related, see Lederman (2022a). Unless otherwise specified, all translations of the *Chuánxí Lù* 傳習錄 (*Instructions for Practical Living*; hereafter IPL), which is our primary source for Wang's views, are adapted from CHAN Wing-tsit (1963) and, where possible, from Ivanhoe (2009) and Ivanhoe's revised translations published in Tiwald and Van Norden (2014).

5. For discussion, see Angle and Tiwald (2017: Chapter 6).

6. See, for example, Cua (1982), Yang (2009), and Lee (2023: 111). For the view that the unity thesis applies not only to morally virtuous actions, see, e.g., Frisina (2002: Chapter 4), Zhang (2021: 135).

7. Some have suggested that this passage is evidence that only knowledge-how is unified with acting, because the quality of your knowing how to *φ* is improved with the quality of your reliable *φ*-ing (Lu 2019: 206–7). The problem
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with such a view is that a person can know ↳ how to *φ* without currently *φ*-ing, and hence that the two are not relevantly unified. I return to this in Section III.

8. Here, I follow Ivanhoe (2009) and Angle and Tiwald (2017) in translating *zhǔ yì* 主意 as "intent." However, I take my point to be compatible with Lederman's (2022a: 593n28) suggestion that *zhǔ yì* 主意 is to be translated as "main goal." This is because, if your *φ*-ing is done for the sake of achieving some goal, then you are *φ*-ing for a reason, and *φ*-ing for reasons has long been treated as a characteristic feature of intentional action (see, e.g., Davidson 1980).

9. For discussion and defense of the concept of knowing-to as I am using it here, see Hetherington (2022a). For an argument that knowing-to also features in the 3rd-century BCE text *Mengzi*, see Brys (2022, 2023), and for the argument that WANG Yangming was heavily influenced by the *Mengzi*, see, e.g., Angle and Tiwald (2017); Zheng (2023).

10. HUANG Yong also calls the relevant kind of knowledge "knowing-to." For ease of reference, I refer to Huang's notion as "knowing that one ought to *φ*" rather than "knowing-to."

11. This has puzzled commentators, with some arguing that, if knowledge-in-action is the beginning of an action, then the relevant knowledge must temporally precede the corresponding action (e.g., Chen 1991: 99; Lee 2023: 103). But the metaphysics here is incorrect. The beginning of *φ*-ing is not an event separate from *φ*-ing. Hence, if knowledge-in-

action is the beginning of *φ*-ing, then it is part of *φ*-ing—it does not temporally precede it. For textual reasons to resist the temporal reading, see also Lederman (2022a: 594–95) and Huang (2017: 73–75).

12. Farkas (2017) makes a similar point in her argument that some answers to wh-questions are only available during the performance of an action, but she takes knowledge of such answers to be propositional. Nothing I say here commits me to the view that knowing-to is *propositional* knowledge.

13. Additionally, this is one reason why knowing-to differs from knowing-that and knowing-how. I can know that saying *these* words is hurtful, and hence not do it. And I can know how to say hurtful words without putting my know-how into practice. But I cannot know to do what I am currently doing without currently doing it. This is because knowledge is factive: if you know that *p*, it cannot be that *p* is false. Hence, if you are knowing to do *this* for you to *φ*, then it cannot be that doing *this* is not a way for you to *φ*. I thank an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

14. Hetherington (2011b, 2017) argues for conceptually distinguishing a person's having knowledge that *p* from her *knowing* that *p*. He conceives of the former as a state that admits of manifestation and the latter as a manifesting of the relevant state in action. On such a view, all cases of knowing that *p* are *p*-related actions. I take this to be compatible with the proposed claim that, to get from a capacity for *φ*-ing to the corresponding act of *φ*-ing, the agent must know to do *this* for her to *φ*.

15. Chang (2016: 1208) and Lederman (2022a: 589–90) offer a reading along these lines.

16. Although my argument emphasizes that, for Wang, (relevant) knowing and acting occur at the same time, this is compatible with Lederman's (2022a) explication of the unity thesis in biconditional form: a person is (relevantly) knowing *if and only if* she is (correspondingly) acting.

17. Taking the "action" part of Wang's unity thesis to only refer to mental acts, such as desiring, appreciating, intending, etc., is a frequent interpretative move (see, e.g., Zheng 2018: 1355; Huang 2017: 78; but for an important exception, see Yang 2009). HUANG Yong sometimes ↳ explicitly glosses the unity thesis in terms of the unity of "knowledge and (desire for) action" (e.g., Huang 2021: 90).

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18. Might it help if we replace "desiring to *φ*" by "appropriately responding to the details of the situation," as recently proposed by Ivanhoe (2022: 61)? I do not think so. If telling my friend a hurtful truth is the appropriate response in a specific situation, then surely I can appropriately respond by accident—namely, I can blurt out the hurtful truth without (relevantly) knowing that this is the appropriate thing to do. What if we draw on recent work by Lederman (2022b, 2023) and argue that not *all* desires are unified with knowing, but only *wholehearted* desires? Although this is not how Lederman would himself conceive of the unity thesis (and a discussion of his views deserves more space than I can offer here), one might nonetheless be tempted to draw inspiration from his account of wholehearted desires in defense of the view that desiring to *φ* entails (relevant) knowing. Very roughly, according to Lederman (2022b: 191n36), a desire is wholehearted *iff* there is no other desire that conflicts with it. All cases of (relevantly) knowing are cases of my faculty of *liángzhī* 良知 knowing that an occurrent desire is good (Lederman 2022b: 197). Hence, one might suggest that I cannot wholeheartedly desire to *φ* without (relevantly) knowing. The problem with such a suggestion, it seems to me, is that there can be many actions and corresponding desires on which a person's *liángzhī* is silent. Lederman (2022b: 178–90) admits that *liángzhī* knows that "particular mental events are right or wrong, *if they are*." (My own emphasis) But if some mental events are neither right nor wrong, it is possible that I can have a wholehearted desire for something on which my *liángzhī* is silent, and hence I can have a wholehearted desire without (relevantly) knowing. In response, one might restrict the scope of the unity thesis to only concern morally virtuous mental actions. That is, if we say that the claim "all wholehearted desires are unified with knowing" only applies to cases where wholehearted desiring is a morally virtuous mental action, then perhaps we might avoid the issue that, for Wang, a person can have a wholehearted desire without (relevantly) knowing, because all morally virtuous actions necessarily involve (relevant) knowing. The problem with such a response is that it would require us to restrict the unity thesis to specifically *mental* actions, and there is no evidence, as far as I can tell, that Wang holds such a restrictive view.

19. For a detailed analysis of our failure to solve the Gettier problem, see Hetherington (2016). In recent years, a growing trend has been to develop approaches that aim to *avoid* the Gettier problem, rather than to *solve* it: for example, analyses of knowledge in terms of practical ability (Hetherington 2011a, 2021; Hyman 2015), true belief (Hetherington 2022a), or views that take knowledge to be unanalyzable (Sayre 1997: Chapter 5; Williamson 2000).

20. For a neo-Anscombean answer to the problem, one that rests on rejecting Sarah Paul's claim that the two agents have

the same kind of knowledge of what they are doing, see Valaris (under review: Chapter 6).

21. I have greatly benefited from written comments on previous drafts of this chapter by Stephen Hetherington, Justin Tiwald, an anonymous referee, and especially Karyn Lai and Philippe Brunozzi. I also thank Markos Valaris and GUO Yuchen for discussion.

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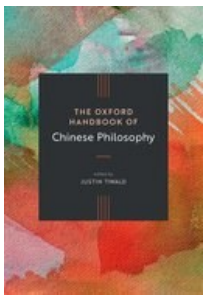

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CHAPTER

22 Knowledge of Human Nature and Morality in Contemporary Confucianism

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Abstract

As everyone who's taken a course on Chinese philosophy probably knows, Mengzi (Mencius) claimed human nature is good. However, what that means and how one knows that it's true are not very clear from the text of the *Mengzi*, giving rise to numerous different interpretations over the history of Confucianism. This chapter compares modern interpretations of Mengzi, both in East Asia and in the United States. It highlights the differences in philosophical methodology—the experiential or introspective method of the 20th-century New Confucians MOU Zongsan and XU Fuguan, and the empirical and naturalistic approach of the modern American scholars Donald Munro and Edward Slingerland—and illustrates how their interpretations reflect their epistemological presumptions. Furthermore, it makes the case that both have weaknesses: the introspective method has a hard time avoiding subjective bias and demonstrating universality of moral judgment, while the empirical approach has a deficit when it comes to motivating action. Since improved moral practice is the primary goal of Confucian philosophy, the empirical approach does not fully do justice to Mengzi.

Keywords: Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, Donald Munro, Edward Slingerland, human nature, moral judgment, Confucianism, Mengzi

Subject: Non-Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy

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I. Introduction

As is well known, the question of human nature is central to Confucian thought since the time of Mengzi and Xunzi. Xunzi frequently criticized Mengzi, evidently motivated by a desire to distinguish his position from what he felt to be the mistaken doctrine of Mengzi. The neo-Confucians of the Song dynasty overwhelmingly sided with Mengzi, agreeing that human nature is good. Xunzi was pushed aside, considered outside the true transmission of the Way (*dàotǒng* 道統) from Kongzi and Mengzi. This situation was repeated in the 20th century as the movement now typically known as New Confucianism took shape. Most of the prominent New Confucians, including XIONG Shili and his students MOU Zongsan and XU Fuguan, followed the basic view of human nature common to Song neo-Confucians. The Mengzian doctrine has dominated East Asian Confucianism.

Among American scholars of Chinese philosophy, there is relatively greater interest in Xunzi, in part because he is more recognizably philosophical. And when looking at the history of Chinese philosophy, American scholars are more apt than Chinese ones to emphasize differences between Mengzi and his Song followers, observing how the impact of Buddhism led them to diverge from Mengzi's original views.[1] Furthermore, the different philosophical approaches result in very different ways of understanding both the content of Mengzi's claim that human nature is good and the arguments for it.

These different perspectives on what it means to say that human nature is good and how we have knowledge of human nature will be
p. 433 the focus of this chapter. Of course, ↳ given the obvious fact that people *aren't* good all—perhaps not even most—of the time, both are fundamental questions for the Mengzian view. The way they answer them illustrates the differences in moral epistemology between East Asian and American Confucian scholars; East Asians favor a priori moral knowledge while American Confucian scholars (for the most part) believe that moral knowledge is empirical. In this chapter, I examine how they interpret the statement that human nature is good and their views on how we have knowledge of human nature.

II. Chinese New Confucians

i. Mou Zongsan (1909–1995)

Widely acclaimed as the most important New Confucian philosopher, MOU Zongsan carried on a sustained engagement with Kant in his later works. He believed that only Chinese philosophy had the resources to complete Kant's project of providing a secure basis for knowledge and morality. Mou accepted central aspects of Kant's philosophy: morality requires autonomy, necessary truths must be a priori, and the two-tier ontology of appearances and things in themselves. In the same way that Kant rejected empirical knowledge as a basis for conclusions about morality, Mou did as well. This makes him the best representative of the a priori method among contemporary Confucians. What he tried to show is that Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, could provide the stable foundation for morality that Kant could not.

Mou does not always use the term *xing* 性, the word in the *Mengzi* that we normally translate as "nature" or "human nature." Due to his desire to engage Western philosophy, he often talks about identifying the self or true self. However, he uses a variety of terms—nature in itself (*xìngtǐ* 性體), innate moral awareness (*liángzhī* 良知), benevolence in itself (*réntǐ* 仁體), free will—to indicate the same thing, the true self as a thing in itself, not mere appearance (Mou 2003: 235–36). Because morality must be autonomous, moral action has to proceed from an autonomous subject that is not merely acted upon. Hence, Mou distinguishes the false self as appearance, which can be an object, from the true self as thing in itself, which cannot be an object given by sensibility. Knowledge of the true self—which is human nature—can only be intellectual, not sensible knowledge (Mou 2003: 185–86). The problem, as Mou notes, is how it is possible to have such knowledge.

As knowledge through understanding requires sensible intuition, intellectual knowledge requires intellectual intuition: intuition of things in themselves and not mere appearances. This is the intuition that would be required to have knowledge of the self as the thing in itself. Kant attributed intellectual intuition only to God, denying that humans had that capacity (Bunnin 2008; Chan 2011: 142). Mou devotes a great deal of *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* to examining where Kant went wrong and defending the
p. 434 possibility of intellectual intuition based on Chinese philosophy. As ↳ intellectual intuition applies to things in themselves, this

clearly points to a nonempirical kind of knowledge (Billioud 2012: 52–53). In Mou's view, we do not learn about human nature by observing how people think and act in the phenomenal world.

Instead, Mou uses a transcendental argument, starting from the reality of moral responses and considering what the necessary conditions are for this to be possible. He uses this method to draw conclusions about the self as a free being, and so he calls his system "moral metaphysics" in contrast to Kant's "metaphysics of morals," because Mou establishes metaphysics on the basis of morality (Chan 2011: 120–21). As he writes in his conclusion, "If morality is not to be an empty concept but rather a real presence, something that is actual, then we must admit that there is a fundamental moral mind capable of issuing a categorical imperative" (Mou 2003: 447). From this we see that Mou agrees that true morality must be a command that the self gives to itself and not determined by something external. The free will can only be a cause, not an effect (Mou 2003: 247).

He starts from the reality of moral commands. Mou does essentially take for granted that a categorical imperative is possible and, although only implicit, that attributions of moral responsibility require a free will (Mou 2003: 248). This he calls a theoretical justification of intellectual intuition, but this type of argument is not intellectual intuition itself. Intellectual intuition is nondiscursive, direct knowledge of the self unmediated by the categories of the understanding (Mou 2003: 204). Thus, the content of the intuition cannot really be put into words, but he does say it is intuition of the fundamental mind and nature in itself, including the basic moral responses described by Mengzi (Mou 2003: 249–50). A moment of awareness of what is morally right (such as the need to bury one's parents in *Mengzi* 3A5) is an instance of intellectual intuition. It is not intuition of an object but, rather, the fundamental mind illuminating and becoming aware of itself, not something external (Mou 2003: 258). It is in the process of moral response that the fundamental mind intuits itself, but although this response is elicited by something in the external world (as in Mengzi's example of seeing a child about to fall into a well), the intuition is directed back to the self, and the mind becomes aware of its own infinite moral responsiveness.

Let us put aside questions about intellectual intuition of one's own moral responses and turn to how Mou moves from realization of one's own moral nature to knowledge of universal human nature. This is important for two reasons. First, because Mengzi claimed everyone (or almost everyone) has the same nature and Mou wants to support this. Second, because he wants to uphold universal moral agency. The Mengzian line of Confucianism believes that moral agency consists in having these innate responses, so anyone who lacks them cannot be a moral person and according to Mengzi is not properly human (*Mengzi* 2A2). Yet the way intellectual intuition makes one aware of one's own fundamental mind suggests that one's self is the only object of intellectual intuition. Intuition of the moral responses of the fundamental heart-mind is becoming aware of and realizing oneself, not others. This creates a gap of how to move from intuiting one's own moral nature to realizing it is universal human nature. One way Mou addresses this is the possibility of sagehood.[2] Although going by different names—the sage in Confucianism, the true person in Daoism, and the
p. 435 buddha in Buddhism—Mou thinks ↳ these are all names for people who have intuited their infinite moral natures (Mou 2003: 448). Without intellectual intuition such realized people could not exist. The universal possibility of this attainment in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism expresses the universality of moral nature: if it were not universal, it would not be possible for everyone to become a sage. Yet the realization is something each person must do himself. However, the reality of this possibility is not something Mou tries to prove, instead accepting it based on its pivotal role in the history of Chinese philosophy. Without intellectual intuition, he says, "The whole of Chinese philosophy would be impossible" (Mou 2003: 5). It is fair to say, as the contemporary philosopher WONG Wai-ying puts it, that for Mou and other New Confucians, the justification of human nature cannot be addressed through logical reasoning or empirical investigation, but a grasp of it "can be reached by practice" (Wong 2021: 485). It illustrates how differently these philosophers thought about knowledge.

ii. Xu Fuguan (1902–1982)

A friend and contemporary of MOU Zongsan, XU Fuguan absorbed some of the same Kantian influence in distinguishing the true self and empirical self and accepting that empirical claims lack necessity and universality. However, while Mou wanted to justify a two-tier ontology of appearances and things in themselves, Xu felt this metaphysical approach was a distraction and did not serve to establish the reality of lived moral experience. Despite also rejecting an empirical basis for morality, Xu's approach can sidestep some of the more challenging aspects of Mou's ontology and possibly find greater space for interaction with approaches common in modern American philosophy.

In Xu's analysis of Chinese thought, the concept of human nature (*xìng* 性) started as a term for describing the desires and abilities people have innately, later evolving to mean what is uniquely human. We find both conceptions in the *Mengzi*. The earlier one is Gaozi's: human nature is essentially the instincts or fundamental desires, such as food and sex, that any animal has (*Mengzi* 6A3, 6A4; Xu 1990: 187). According to Mengzi, human nature is what *distinguishes* human beings from other animals. Human beings have the capacity for self-mastery and need not follow their desires (Xu 1990: 161, 165–66). This is how he interprets *Mengzi* 7B24 on the distinction between nature (*xing* 性) and destiny (*mìng* 命) and 4B21 on the difference between human beings and animals. Xu's view of morality as requiring autonomy is evident in how he interprets these passages. Moral action is something qualitatively different from acting on desires. The mature conception of human nature in the *Mengzi* is not an empirical assertion. Human nature is a universal and objective reality that cannot be known empirically (Elstein 2021: 208–9; Xu 1990: 65, 86; Xu 2022c: 190).

As Xu understands it, Mengzi's claim that human nature is good is not an empirical claim but, rather, asserts a universal capacity for moral judgment and action. Specifically, it is the moral capacity of the heart-mind, the four fundamental moral feelings that Mengzi
p. 436 identified: benevolence, rightness, ritual propriety, and wisdom (Xu 1990: 163, ↳ 284). The presence of these is what constitutes moral agency and makes human beings different from animals.

Xu does not use the language of autonomy (*zìlǜ* 自律) as such, but he distinguishes two categories of motives. There are the physiological desires associated with the body, which he terms *outer*, and there are the responses of the heart-mind, which he terms *inner*. These responses of the heart-mind are the four moral feelings, which are not affects in the usual sense of the word. In Mengzi's paradigm case of seeing a child about to fall into a well, the feeling of alarm and compassion is not a response of the desires, but the direct manifestation of the heart-mind (Xu 1990: 172). Although Xu has a Kantian-inspired distinction between autonomous action and action based on desire, moral judgment is not a strictly rational process. Moral awareness is not due to reason, nor is it based on desires or emotions. The responses of the heart-mind are something entirely distinct.

Xu distinguishes moral and cognitive functions of the heart-mind (Elstein 2021: 206). The moral function (*déxìng* 德性) is constituted by the four basic moral responses. The cognitive function (*zhīxìng* 知性) of the heart-mind is important, but it belongs to a fundamentally distinct category and cannot generate moral responses. The cognitive function generates knowledge of the external world, but accumulating such facts does not itself elicit a moral response (Xu 1990: 240). He does endorse a distinction between fact and value. While Xu remains a realist about value, he concedes that values are a different sort of thing from facts about the world.

Xu sees a significant difference between moral awareness and ordinary cognition. This originates in his views on the importance of motivation and autonomy. If moral knowledge were like knowledge of facts, it would be learning something external to oneself and not realizing one's own moral subjectivity. This results in Xunzi's position, where morality has to be initially imposed from without rather than developed within oneself. However, without some existing motivating force, learning facts about the world does nothing to generate action. Even if one is taught what is good, without caring about the good it will not lead to action. For action to be possible at all, there have to be some inherently existing motives and preferences (Xu 1990: 195). The capacity to make moral judgments has to be innate, or moral distinctions could not be learned.

The way Xu distinguishes moral awareness and cognitive knowledge and his emphasis on the inner domain of morality raises questions about how one comes to know human nature. The way Xu distinguishes the two functions of the heart-mind seemingly makes it impossible to demonstrate the reality of the moral responses in anything approaching a scientific way. Since knowledge is of the external world and the moral responses belong to the inner world, anything that can be the object of cognitive knowledge must be external and thus not the true moral responses of the inner self. The empirical approach, as he calls Xunzi's examination of what people actually do, cannot reveal the inner self (Xu 1990: 224). And yet Xu must offer some reason to believe that the moral responses are real and human nature is good.

One reason he gives as evidence that human nature is good is that people universally prefer virtue. Note that this is not a naive claim
p. 437 about what people actually do or ↳ even about what they claim they would do in a particular situation. Once desires are involved, then self-interest enters in, and we no longer have the pure, fundamental nature. Xu instead looks at what people prefer in others, especially in rulers. This is what makes the Confucian ideal of rule by virtue possible: the fact that people respond to the virtue of rulers and prefer benevolent rule (Xu 2022b: 244). The suggestion is that we can avoid the complications of self-interest better by looking at what people expect and want from others. This is a point that generalizes beyond political preferences. Having moral

expectations of others indicates a belief that they can live up to them. It attributes the possibility of moral action to people generally (Elstein 2014: 209–10). Even when not articulated as a theoretical belief, it is implicit in the way people act most of the time.

The natural objection to this is that it falls far short of proof that *everyone* is capable of moral responses. Xu will have to concede this. The way he distinguishes recognition of moral values from facts means that he must recognize that the goodness of human nature cannot be proved in the sense of demonstrated fact. In this respect Xu differs from MOU Zongsan, who criticized Kant for leaving the free will (the foundation of the possibility of morality) as a postulate. According to Xu, the goodness of human nature is not the sort of claim that can *be* a fact, but that does not mean it is simply a fanciful wish or groundless assumption, either.

Xu's other main method for illustrating the reality of human nature is what he calls "embodied recognition" (*tīrèn* 體認).[3] This is the direct awareness of the responses of the heart-mind to relevant phenomena (Xu 2022a: 168), much like WANG Yangming's innate moral awareness (*liangzhi* 良知). When one sees a child about to fall into a well, one has a response of alarm and compassion (*Mengzi* 2A6). This is a pretheoretical, prereflective response to the suffering of an innocent (Liu 2001: 68). We do not understand how it happens, but the feeling cannot be denied (Xu 1990: 125). Xu refers to this as an internal experience (*nèizài jīngyàn* 內在經驗) (Xu 2022a: 170). Although elicited by something external (such as witnessing the child), the moral response is located within the self and not in the phenomenon. Xu refers to morality as transcendent or supra-empirical, but this characterization may be misleading. It is true that moral facts cannot be uncovered by investigation of the external world. The moral spirit is not part of the objective world. However, Xu resolutely denies that Confucianism is a form of idealism, or that the heart-mind is something that transcends the physiology of the body (Ni 2002: 286–87). For this reason, Xu refers to his view as "within the self" (*xíng ér zhōng xúe* 形而中學) rather than metaphysical (*xíng ér shàng xúe* 形而上學) (1990: 84–85; 2022a: 168). Although Xu also rejects empirical investigation into human nature, he does not place the self in a separate ontological realm.

III. American Confucianism

The internal, practical method of understanding human nature common in New Confucianism is hardly to be found in American (or
p. 438 European) scholarship. The ↳ method in American Confucianism is generally inductive, focusing on making empirically supported generic claims about human nature. A substantial current favors taking a naturalistic approach, meaning that a reasonable interpretation of Confucian morality must cohere with the findings of the sciences. Proponents of this kind of view, including Donald Munro and Edward Slingerland, argue that any morality, including Confucian morality, is limited—though not determined—by what fields such as cognitive science and evolutionary psychology have to say about human nature and the way people make moral judgments. This means they reject the armchair introspective approach of the New Confucians in favor of relying on empirical data when possible.

Broadly speaking, this more empirical method of investigating human nature is associated with a virtue-centered approach to Confucian ethics. The scholars I will examine in this section are proponents of looking at Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics, or minimally a theory of virtue. Their interest in which virtues are part of a flourishing life guides their examination of human nature. They believe there are serious flaws in any attempt to determine virtues through introspection. A respectable account of human nature must be empirically based.

The power and appeal of the a priori method is of course the dream of finding necessary truths, moral rules, or principles as incontrovertible as those of logic. This was Kant's goal in his quest for synthetic a priori knowledge; as he notes, through experience we can never find any necessary truths. This Kantian position made a great impact on New Confucians, leading to the rejection of experience as a basis for the morality illustrated earlier.

This point is acknowledged as well by American scholars, and accordingly they give up on strict universality when they characterize human nature inductively. Hence Philip Ivanhoe calls Mengzi's characterization of human nature a "generic claim," meaning "a claim about normal healthy representatives of the class of creatures we call human beings." It is not meant to apply strictly to *every Homo sapiens* defined biologically and thus is not falsified if indeed there are a few exceptions (Ivanhoe 2002: 222–23). Bryan Van Norden follows this reading of Ivanhoe. In considering the possibility of psychopaths—that is, people who lack basic feelings of love and empathy—Van Norden notes the empirical evidence that such people exist but denies that their existence is a strong

objection to Mengzi's view, since he was not trying to make a claim about every single human being, but only normal human beings who grow up in a minimally suitable environment (2007: 220–22). They recognize that inductive generalizations cannot be exceptionless. This is the trade-off of abandoning the a priori method.

i. The Weakness of A Priori Investigation

The inductive method is often taken for granted by these scholars and not always justified. Two who do defend this methodology explicitly are Munro and Slingerland; though neither refers to New Confucianim specifically, their criticisms still apply.

p. 439 Munro writes about the neo-Confucian project of attributing the goodness of human nature to Heaven and hence the use of concepts such as the way of Heaven (*tiāndào* 天道) or heavenly pattern (*tiānlǐ* 天理) to explain why human nature is good. When Song neo-Confucians linked Heaven to human nature this way, Munro thinks they were doing something new (2005: 12–13). In his view, Mengzi derived his understanding of human nature from "accurate descriptions of human social life" (2005: 8). New Confucians use neo-Confucian language as well, connecting human nature to Heaven or the universe as a whole and seeing the universe as something with a moral pattern. Munro compares this use of Heaven to the role of God in Christian ethics, implying it is a matter of faith that cannot be empirically justified. What can be is common biological nature. Hence to avoid controversial matters of faith and to join the international philosophical discourse that prefers not to rely on indefeasible appeals to transcendent entities like God or Heaven, Munro thinks Confucians would do better to rely on biological claims and not theological ones (2005: 17). It seems this is a strategic move: if Confucians care about being taken seriously in international philosophical dialogue, this means accepting its norms and avoiding reliance on epistemically controversial appeals.

Edward Slingerland argues more generally for integrating the findings of science into humanistic studies. He believes that an embodied approach to culture can avoid the problems of objectivism (including the a priori method) and postmodern rejection of any cross-cultural norms. Going a step beyond Munro, he argues for taking science seriously not merely because "science" has such prestige in modern cultures (although it does), but most fundamentally because the natural sciences "demonstrably and reliably *work*" (Slingerland 2008: 248): they provide better explanations than the alternatives because they allow us to do more. He defends "vertical integration": a more unified system of knowledge where the higher levels (the level of culture studied by the humanities) are erected on the lower levels, including cognitive science, neuropsychology, and ultimately down to biology and physics. These lower-level explanations constrain but do not determine the higher-level explanations (Slingerland 2008: 261). This means that a moral theory, such as Confucianism, must be compatible with the best current scientific accounts of human thought and behavior. These scientific accounts eliminate some possibilities without converging on any one theory.

One problem with the a priori method is that it is inevitably the result of one individual's thought with all the attendant possibilities of unconscious bias. While mathematics was a model for Enlightenment philosophers, it is difficult to say that laws of human interaction can be discovered merely by dispassionate logic. Annette Baier has given a devastating and humorous critique of most modern moral philosophy:

> The great moral theorists in our tradition are not only all men, they are mostly men who had minimal adult dealings with (and so were minimally influenced by) women. With a few significant exceptions … they are a collection of clerics, misogynists, and puritan bachelors. It should not surprise us, then, that particularly in the modern period they managed to … focus their philosophical attention so single-mindedly on cool, distanced relations between more or less free and equal
> p. 440 adult strangers, say, the ↳ members of an all-male club, with membership rules and rules for dealing with rule-breakers. (Baier 1994: 114)

What one takes in the comfort of one's armchair to be universal human nature may instead be the moral principles one finds personally congenial. Their objectivity is open to doubt.[4]

Even when they do not reflect personal bias, armchair investigation can hardly avoid reflecting culturally learned responses and may take them to be representative of human nature as a whole. In 6A7, Mengzi uses the example of opinions of physical attractiveness as evidence that the senses have common preferences. Yet one need only look at artistic representations over the centuries to see there is a great deal of variance about what is considered attractive. Even now there is a considerable cultural difference. In the

United States, paleness is (generally) considered unhealthy and less attractive, so now that the dangers of sun exposure are understood there is an entire industry dedicated to reproducing the look of tanning without sun exposure. In East Asia, darker skin is considered less attractive, so instead there is a vast array of whitening products available. This is not to say that there are no universal standards for beauty, but without cross-cultural investigation and comparison, it is easy to take the preferences of one's culture as universal. In morality, people do the same thing. Mill's harm principle is so common and ingrained in contemporary Americans (even if they have never read Mill), that they may be apt to take it for a universal moral principle. Understanding other cultures can reveal it for the product of a certain history that it is.

ii. Emotions and Moral Judgment

These problems and the great success of empirical approaches argue for a different way of investigating human nature, using the findings of cognitive science, empirical psychology, evolutionary biology, and other fields to get a better handle on what can be plausibly attributed to human nature and what is likely cultural. As these fields have investigated human thought and moral judgments, they have uncovered results that are significant for Confucian ethics.

One finding that supports traditional and modern Confucian philosophy is that moral judgments are not solely based on reason; in fact, affective responses are more significant. Jonathan Haidt has demonstrated that moral judgments are typically emotional first, with reason employed for post hoc justification when necessary (Haidt 2007; Haidt, Koller, and Dias 1993; Haidt and Kesebir 2010). According to this work, the reason/inclination split so prominent in Western philosophy (Kant is only the most obvious example) simply isn't reflective of how people actually make moral judgments. Slingerland reviews work that shows that purely rational judgments don't even seem to be possible: people with attenuated emotional responses find it difficult to decide anything at all (Slingerland 2008: 43–46). Mengzi himself emphasized the importance of emotions in morality. Of course, it is still possible to claim
p. 441 —as Kant surely would ↳ have—that people *ought* to make moral judgments based on reason rather than emotion, but if the hope is for people to act well, a model of judgment that is so far from actual human judgment may not be very practical. If Confucian judgment models typical human cognition more accurately, it may well be easier for people to practice.

One might think that evolutionary theory constitutes a strong objection to Confucian ethics, since it suggests that organisms, even genes, are fundamentally selfish, striving only to ensure their propagation, hence Richard Dawkins's famous book *The Selfish Gene* (1989). One may be tempted to conclude that there are no innate moral dispositions. However, human beings don't mechanistically do whatever their genes want. The fact that people can choose celibacy, childlessness, and suicide is evidence of that. Mengzi's assertion that human nature is good is tantamount to claiming that human beings are not (entirely) selfish. While they of course pursue their own interests—Mengzi thinks there is nothing in itself wrong with that—they have certain moral responses to situations where no interest is at stake, or even in opposition to their interests. The existence of the four feelings or four sprouts, a central aspect of his theory, means that people are not just selfish (*Mengzi* 6A6).

Some psychologists agree that there are basic innate moral responses, often similar to what Mengzi identified over 2,000 years ago. Affection of parents for their children is unlikely to be controversial, but researchers have found more general prosocial sentiments. In an attempt to filter out cultural influence as much as possible, Hamlin and Wynn focused on preverbal infants in their experiments, consistently finding that they preferred prosocial others (exhibition of helping behavior) as third-party observers (Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom 2007, 2011; Hamlin and Wynn 2011). This is one major source of support for innate moral preferences. Haidt and Joseph have studied moral judgments cross-culturally, finding five basic responses that are at the foundation of moral judgments: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Haidt and Joseph 2004, 2007).[5] These do not match up precisely with Mengzi's list of the four basic feelings, but what he does identify as the most fundamental, benevolence and rightness, do correspond fairly closely. A key aspect of benevolence is sensitivity to harm. Respect for social roles is an important part of rightness, very similar to Haidt and Joseph's authority/respect category.[6] This research supports Mengzi's conclusion that there are innate moral responses in all normal human beings.

iii. Evolution and Morality

Going a step beyond social psychology, Munro and Slingerland put a great deal of weight on evolutionary explanations. In place of Heaven or Pattern, evolution becomes their explanation of why human nature is the way it is: put differently, this is just how we happen to be. Accordingly, it is important to them that there *are* evolutionary explanations. If not, this casts doubt on whether a given trait is indeed part of human nature.

An example is altruism. Altruism for kin can be fairly easily accounted for with reproductive and inclusive fitness; roughly, that
p. 442 altruistic behavior for kin increases ↳ likelihood of one's genes being carried on (Nichols 2011: 611–62). Altruism for nonkin is less obvious. Munro builds on the work of Robert Trivers and others to argue for the mutual benefits of cooperative activity. Altruistic behavior may be reciprocated in the future, and work in game theory illustrates the benefits of cooperative behavior in activities where individuals interact multiple times, and thus defection can be punished. The presence of reciprocal altruism in nonhuman species (for example, warning calls when predators are nearby, which may attract the predator to the animal making the call) gives further reason to think that this behavior is not solely cultural (Munro 2005: 75–77).

Identifying physical structures that are involved in moral response is another way scholars argue that these can be scientifically confirmed as part of human nature. It is not very controversial that evolution works on physical traits, selecting those that turn out to be advantageous. Pinpointing physical structures that underlie moral responses implies that they too are results of evolution and again a part of biological nature rather than entirely cultural and learned. This is what Munro does when he connects mirror neurons, which make possible mentally copying the feelings of others, to empathy and moral response (Munro 2005: 58).

Similarly, Slingerland argues for a neurological basis to the innate "theory of mind," the term he uses to attribute beliefs, intentionality, and other mental states to certain existents in the world (particularly animals) and not to others (plants, immobile objects) (Slingerland 2008: 132–34). While not as directly related to moral responses per se, attributing mental states to others allows attributing choice to them, and thus the capacity to be morally responsible for their actions. This is a prerequisite for attributions of praise and blame, which do not apply to mere things. If this theory of mind can be traced to some physical features of the brain, that is an argument that it too is innate rather than learned, and hence that judging others' actions is as well.

iv. Limits to the Evolutionary Approach

Let's see where Chinese and American Confucian scholars agree. Human nature refers to characteristics that are widely shared and that are innate in the sense of being organized in advance of experience. These include mental features, which are themselves responsible for structuring experience and make learning and knowledge possible. Slingerland refers to this as the "evolutionary Kantian" position: Kantian in positing basic mental categories that make experience possible, and evolutionary in describing how they came to exist (Slingerland 2008: 117–21). New Confucians can accept the first part. The second part will be a harder pill. It implies a level of randomness at odds with their perception of a moral universe (Billioud 2012: 28–31). We just *happened* to be social animals, mostly dependent on groups for survival, and certain adaptations (such as reciprocal altruism) just *happened* to be useful for us. If things had turned out otherwise, we would have a different human nature that doesn't include benevolence and rightness.

It is fair to ask if that type of counterfactual question makes any difference. Sure, one might say that if we'd evolved differently, we
p. 443 would have a different human nature and a ↳ different morality. But we didn't, and this is the human nature that we have (at least the current understanding of it). Moreover, it does accord fairly well with Mengzi's picture. Yet when we get to the level of how this translates into moral practice, we do find some difficulties about how the theories about human nature (assuming they continue to be confirmed) translate into what we should or should not do. In short, the problem of fact and value arises again: what normative significance should be accorded to evolutionary tendencies, and which ones?

A difficulty for an evolutionary view of Confucianism or any morality is that it has to involve cherry-picking certain evolved preferences and discounting others. Traditional Confucians did the same thing, of course. When Gaozi claims that "food and sex are nature," Mengzi never entirely disagrees (*Mengzi* 6A4). While he tacitly concedes that desires are natural (not learned), they are not what is distinctive about human beings. People should focus on what makes them different from other animals, not what they share

(*Mengzi* 4B19). While perhaps this is somewhat arbitrary, it at least provides a way of distinguishing moral and amoral impulses. But if all tendencies are products of evolution, which ones should we follow?

It seems fairly obvious that some tendencies may have been useful at one point but are maladaptive in modern circumstances. Slingerland cites preferences for sugar and fat: advantageous when these were difficult to come by, but now the source of health problems in this age of fast food and convenience stores (Slingerland 2008: 268). More significant morally, Munro recognizes how tendencies to a tribal mentality and out-group discrimination are troubling (Munro 2005: 59, 68–69).[7] In times when strangers were very possibly a significant threat, this may well have been a useful disposition. In pluralistic and multicultural societies, obviously it leads to moral problems. Munro's recommendation is to institute legal protections to combat discrimination and nepotism, but he needs to explain this: why are these natural tendencies bad and others (like reasonable preference for kin) good?

Munro appeals to a consequentialist standard for the value of increased cooperation, which means limiting in-group favoritism and reducing out-group bias. The solution to the problem I outlined earlier is "to study the question of the possible survival value of enlarging group cooperation" (Munro 2005: 69). This raises a host of questions: survival for whom? How sure is he that such cooperation will increase survival and what if it doesn't? One citation of E. O. Wilson aside, he has little evidence. Dawkins highlights the "special" and "limited" forms of altruism that can aid survival, specifically saying species-wide altruism does "not make evolutionary sense" (1989: 2). Furthermore, whose survival is at stake? The in-group or the disfavored out-group? Surely out-group bias can negatively impact survival. However, it seems likely that it mostly affects the out-group. More importantly, suppose it were the case that discrimination increases survival chances of oneself and one's favored in-group. Would we then conclude that it is moral? I think not, and I assume Munro would agree. Then the mere fact that a trait confers a survival advantage is not enough to endorse it as a virtue. One begins to wonder what the significance of the appeal to evolutionary psychology is.

p. 444 Neither Munro nor Slingerland is a biological determinist: we do not always do what our genes want us to do, or even what is in our own interests as biological beings. The fact that some people choose to be childless or engage in smoking is proof enough. In Dawkins's words, "We are built as gene machines … but we have the power to turn against our creators (1989: 201). Once we admit that, and that there are some innate tendencies (male aggression, out-group bias, attraction to sugar, what have you) that should not be followed, it becomes unclear why innate tendencies should be normative. As Flanagan and Williams note, whether a trait is a virtue or vice depends on much more than whether it is part of human nature (Flanagan and Williams 2010: 444–45). It seems we need another standard to decide what the good traits are, and ethics is no longer based on evolution.

One final example concerning morality: Haidt argues that moral judgments are largely affect based but that sometimes reason can override initial intuitive judgments (Haidt 2007: 999). If this is possible and often a good thing, then what is so great about following intuitive judgments at all? Both Munro and Slingerland suggest that the focus on reason in certain moral theories (archetypically Kant) goes against human nature and is likely to be alienating (Munro 2005: 78; Slingerland 2008: 308). It is at least arguable that Kant intended the categorical imperative as a theory of value and not necessarily a decision procedure; Mill is even clearer that no one will use the principle of utility every time they have to make a moral judgment. These are axiological principles, not necessarily how people will or should think all the time (admittedly Kant suggests that sometimes). Correspondingly, it is one thing to say that moral judgments are usually intuitive. It something else to claim that intuitive judgments are morally correct (Pinker 2002: 15). If intuitive judgments don't always get things right, what is the standard of right? And why not try to rely on them less?

IV. Conclusion

Two questions arise out of this comparison between Chinese and American approaches to the question of human nature. There is the textual question of what Mengzi meant. To some extent, this question misrepresents what Mengzi was trying to do. I don't think a distinction between a priori and empirical knowledge existed in Mengzi's time, though of course we could still ask which he seems to appeal to. His own concerns were more practical: the idea of human nature (I hesitate to use the word "theory") was intended to combat views like YANG Zhu's—which characterized human nature as egoistic—and Gaozi's—which claimed that human nature had no specific tendencies. Both Yang and Gaozi argued that morality is fundamentally unnatural (Van Norden 2007: 200–211, 279–83). The paradigm cases that Mengzi appealed to, like the child about to fall into a well, were not intended as proof so much as to arouse the right kind of motivation. His focus is moral action, not theory.

That said, the analogies to preferences in food and beauty and his focus on a certain kind of moral feeling suggest to me that Munro
p. 445 is correct: Mengzi was giving empirical ↳ evidence for his claims (Munro 2005: 63–64; Van Norden 2007: 222–24). Furthermore, there are indications that, as Ivanhoe claims, Mengzi thought of "human nature is good" as a generic rather than universal claim. In the famous Ox Mountain story he implies that the incipient dispositions to morality can be destroyed entirely (6A8). When he says that "anyone without the heart of compassion is not human" (2A6) he appears to concede that there could be biological *Homo sapiens* without the moral dispositions, whether through some environmental cause or congenitally. The weight of the textual evidence to me indicates that Mengzi thought of this as an empirical claim based on general experience of what people are normally like.

The more important question, however, is which method best justifies the goodness of human nature. I believe both approaches have work to do. The difficulties with the a priori method have been examined earlier. On the empirical side, the main question is the normative force of biological tendencies. Since they are not determinative, we are faced with needing to explain what makes some innate tendencies good to follow while others should be checked as best we can. The evolutionary basis may be useful to know but does not by itself provide clear moral direction. XU Fuguan's distinction between outer desires and inner moral feelings is one way of doing this but has its own difficulties and does not coexist easily with the empirical approach. A virtue theory of flourishing, where biological flourishing is only one component, has some promise, but of course any such understanding of flourishing will have to be sufficiently general to apply to most cultures.

From the perspective of moral practice, the concern is what empirical knowledge of human nature achieves as far as motivating action. It may be very little. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the people most often admired as moral heroes—one thinks of Gandhi, King, or Mother Theresa—were deeply religious.[8] It seems perfectly possible for someone to have the theoretical knowledge of evolutionary psychology and cognitive science, be convinced of the game-theoretic benefits of reciprocal altruism, and yet not act altruistically. As far as the empirical studies to date have been able to find, professional training in ethics in the United States does very little to change behavior (Schwitzgebel and Rust 2016; Van Norden 2007: 339–40).[9] By the lights of New Confucianism, a view that I think would be shared by many people, this is a failing. The goal after all is improved moral practice. Hence Mou and Xu emphasize finding and identifying with one's moral feelings. Where the sciences can help is that it seems plausible that views about human nature are somewhat self-fulfilling. Someone convinced that people are selfish all the way through will probably tend to act that way. If one believes that in fact people do have unselfish concern for others, it is more likely that one can find those feelings in oneself. Ultimately, that personal experience is crucial for motivation.

Notes

1. **This goes back to the Qing Confucian DAI Zhen, if not earlier.**
2. **His other arguments about the unity of the infinite self are also relevant, but space precludes considering them. See Billioud (2012: 184–88).**

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3. **Xu's term *tiren* was used by XIONG Shili, who drew it from Wang's thought (Gao 2001).**
4. **On this problem in Mou's thought specifically, see Chan (2011: 172–77).**
5. **Recently a group including Haidt have explored a sixth category, freedom/oppression (Iyer et al. 2012).**
6. **For a different opinion on the symmetry between Mengzi and Haidt's list, see Flanagan and Williams (2010: 437–39).**
7. **On automatic tendencies to prefer in-groups, see Bar-Haim et al. (2006); Fiske (1998).**
8. **I suggest that this is worth researching in empirical moral psychology. Evolutionary psychology aside, what are the subjective beliefs of people who are generally admired as morally good? Can physicalism do as well as some kind of transcendent belief in motivating moral behavior?**
9. **It would be interesting to compare results in the United States with East Asia, where I think there is greater expectation that studying ethics makes a practical impact.**

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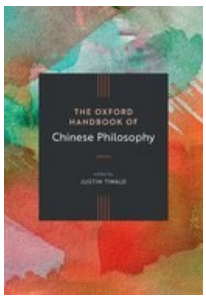

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